

Sūrah Hūd

Sūrah Hūd is Makki and it has 123 Verses and 10 Sections

Verses 1 - 5

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

With the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Very Merciful

الرَّفِ كِتَابٌ أُحْكِمَتْ آيَاتُهُ ثُمَّ فُصِّلَتْ مِنْ لَدُنْ حَكِيمٍ خَبِيرٍ ﴿١﴾
 أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا اللَّهَ إِنِّي لَكُمْ مِنْهُ نَذِيرٌ وَبَشِيرٌ ﴿٢﴾ وَأَنِ
 اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ يُمَتِّعْكُمْ مَتَاعًا حَسَنًا إِلَى
 أَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى وَيُؤْتِ كُلَّ ذِي فَضْلٍ فَضْلَهُ وَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنِّي
 أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ كَبِيرٍ ﴿٣﴾ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ وَهُوَ
 عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٤﴾ أَلَّا إِنَّهُمْ يَأْتُونَ صُدُورَهُمْ
 لِيَسْتَخْفُوا مِنْهُ أَلَا حِينَ يَسْتَغْشُونَ ثِيَابَهُمْ لَا يُعْلَمُ مَا يَسِرُّونَ
 وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ ۚ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿٥﴾

Alif, Lām, Rā. (This is) a book the verses of which have been made firm, then elaborated by a Being All Wise, All Aware, [1] (with an order) that you worship none but Allah – surely, I am for you a warner from Him, and a bearer of glad tidings [2] – and that you seek forgiveness from your Lord, then, turn to Him in repentance. He shall, then, provide you with good things to enjoy for a given time, and bestow His added grace on everyone of excellence. And if you turn away, then, I fear for you the punishment of a great day. [3] To Allah is your return and He is powerful over everything. [4] Beware, they bend their chests to hide from Him. Beware, when they make their clothes a cover, He knows what they hide and what they expose. Surely, He is All Aware of what lies in the hearts. [5]

Commentary

Sūrah Hūd is among the Sūrahs that describe the coming of several kinds of mass punishments triggered by Divine displeasure as well as the horrendous happenings of the fateful day of Judgement and its outcome in the form of individual reward and punishment, all in a manner that is unique.

For this reason, when a few strands of hair in the blessed beard of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had turned visibly grey, Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه expressed his concern by saying: ‘*Yā Rasūlallāh*, you have become old.’ He said: ‘Yes, Sūrah Hūd has made me old.’ There are reports which also add Sūrah al-Wāqī‘ah, al-Mursalāt, ‘Amma Yataṣā‘alūn (an-Naba’) and at-Takwīr with Sūrah Hūd. (Reported by al-Ḥakīm and Tirmidhī)

The sense articulated through the Ḥadīth given above was to highlight that such was the awe and terror inspired by the mention of these happenings that it caused the emergence of the signs of old age.

The first verse of the Sūrah opens with the letters: ال (*alif, lām, rā*). These are isolated letters the meaning of which is a secret between Allah Ta‘ālā and His Rasūl. Others have not been informed about it. Rather, they have been prohibited from even worrying about it.

After that, about the Holy Qur’ān it was said that it was a book the verses of which are made ‘*muḥkam*’ (firm). The word: محكم (*muḥkam*) is from: احكام (*iḥkām*) which means such a correct balancing of meaningful speech as would not leave the probability of any error or disorder in word or meaning. Based on this definition, the making of these verses ‘*muḥkam*,’ firm or established would mean that Allah Ta‘ālā has made these verses such as do not admit of any likelihood and probability of any error in words, or disorder in meanings, or defect, or falsity. (Qurtubī)

And Sayyidnā ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās رضى الله عنه has said that ‘*muḥkam*’ (firm) at this place stands in contrast to ‘*mansūkh*’ (abrogated). And the sense is that Allah Ta‘ālā has made the verses of the Qur’ān as a whole firm, non-abrogated – that is, the way earlier Books, Torah, Injil etc. were abrogated after the revelation of the Qur’ān. But, after the revelation of this Book, since the very chain of the coming of prophets and revelations came to an end, therefore, this

Book will not be abrogated until the last day of *Qiyāmah*. (Qurtubī) As for the abrogation of some verses of the Qur'ān through the Qur'ān itself, it is not contrary to this.

In the same verse, given there was another standing feature of the Qur'ān: *ثُمَّ نُفَصِّلُكَ* (*thumma fuṣṣilat*) that is, 'then these verses were elaborated'. The real meaning of *tafsīl* or elaboration is to separate two things and make them distinct from each other. For this reason, different sections in ordinary (Arabic) books bear the heading of 'Faṣl'. At this place, the elaboration of verses could also mean that the verses concerning beliefs, acts of worship, dealings, social living, morals etc. have been separated from each other and described clearly.

And it could also mean that, as far as Allah Ta'ālā's will is concerned, the entire Qur'ān had already been embedded in the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*). But, later it was revealed bit by bit in many installments as necessitated under different conditions prevailing among peoples and countries, so that its preservation could become easy and acting in accordance with it also turns out to be functionally convenient.

After that, it was said: *مِنْ لَدُنْ حَكِيمٍ خَبِيرٍ* that is, all these verses have come from a Sacred Being who is absolutely and simultaneously Wise and Aware. In other words, there are so many considerations of wisdom ingrained in everything that issues forth from Him. It is impossible for human beings to encompass them all. Then He is fully aware of every particle, present now or to be present in the future, of this multifaceted universe. He knows all states of their existence as it is and as it will be and releases His commands keeping all this in sight. This is not like what human beings do. No matter how intelligent, smart and experienced they may be, their reason and vision are still cordoned by a limited frame of reference. Their experience is the product of what is around them. And this, mostly, proves to be unsuccessful, even wrong, especially when it concerns what would happen in the future under different times and conditions. (Interestingly enough, the observations of the commentator apply to what we now know as the intellectual phenomena of Futurology with its pundits, fellow travelers and dabblers all over the world, including Pakistan! - tr.).

From the second verse begins the delineation of one of the most important and foremost themes, that of Tauḥīd, the Oneness of Allah

Ta'ālā. It is said: **أَلَّا تَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ** (that you worship none but Allah). It means that among things stated in these verses the most important and foremost is that no one else should be worshipped except the One Allah.

After that, it was said: **إِنِّي لَكُمْ مِنْهُ نَذِيرٌ وَبَشِيرٌ** (Surely, I am for you a warner from Him, and a bearer of glad tidings). It means that the noble messenger of Allah صلى الله عليه وسلم has been commanded to tell the whole world through these verses that he was for them a carrier of warning (against disobedience) and a bearer of glad tidings (of blessings in this life and in the life to come) from Allah.

The word: **نَذِير** (*nadhīr*) is usually taken to mean a person who puts the fear of something into someone's heart. But, this word is not used to denote a fear-generating enemy or beast or others that harm. Instead of that, *nadhīr* is applied to a person who, out of his love and affection to someone, warns him against and saves him from some harmful things. These could be things that harm in this world and might as well could be those that bring harm in the Hereafter.

Out of the instructions given in these verses of the Qur'an, the second one appears in the third verse in the words: **وَأَنْ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ** (and that you seek forgiveness from your Lord). It means that, in these verses of firm and established meaning, Allah Ta'ālā has also instructed His servants to ask for forgiveness and pardon from their Lord, and make their Taubah before Him. Forgiveness (*maghfirah*) relates to past sins and Taubah (repentance) relates to the resolve of not going near these anymore. And, in reality, a correct and true Taubah is no more than being ashamed of past sins, praying to Allah that they be forgiven and resolving firmly that they would not be repeated in future. Therefore, some righteous elders have said that seeking forgiveness from Allah only verbally – without having made a firm resolution, and the necessary arrangements to implement it, in order to remain safe from future sins – is the Taubah (repentance) of liars (*al-kadhdhābīn*). (Qurtubī) Or, as it was said poetically:

معصيت را خنده می آید بر استغفار ما

'Sin laughs at my style of seeking forgiveness'

or that such repentance is itself worth being repented.

After that, glad tidings of the finest fruits of success in *Dunyā* and

'*Ākhirah* have been given to those who repent and seek forgiveness by saying: *مَتَّبِعْكُمْ مَتَّاعًا حَسَنًا إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى* (He will, then, provide you with good things to enjoy for a given time). It means that those who genuinely seek forgiveness for their past sins and firmly resolve to abstain from these in future and do what it takes to implement their resolution, then, not only that their error will be forgiven, they would also be blessed with a good life. And it is obvious that 'life' here carries a general sense that includes life in the mortal world as well as the life in the Hereafter. It is about such people that the Qur'ān has said elsewhere: *لَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةً* (We shall certainly give them good and pure life – 16:97). According to the investigations of the majority of commentators, both the lives of *Dunyā* and '*Ākhirah* are included in the sense of this verse as well. This has been further clarified in Sūrah Nūh. The address is to the seekers of forgiveness. It was said: *مُرْسِلَ السَّمَاءِ عَلَيْكُمْ مِدْرَارًا* *وَبِمُدْرَدُكُمْ بِأَمْوَالٍ وَأَنْهَارٍ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ جَنَّاتٍ وَجَعَلْ لَكُمْ أَنْهَارًا* It means: (if you were to seek forgiveness from Allah genuinely), Allah Ta'ālā shall send the sky showering over you (the rains of His mercy) and bless you with wealth and children and make for you gardens and bring for you rivers – 71:11). It is obvious that the mercy of rains and the blessings of wealth and children relate to the life of the present world.

That is why most of the commentators have taken the expression *مَتَّاعًا حَسَنًا* (good things to enjoy) to mean the worldly enjoyments. According to them the sense is that, 'Allah Ta'ālā shall bless you with extended sustenance and easy modalities of comfort and protect you from calamities and punishments – as a result of the forgiveness you seek and the repentance you show. And since this worldly life must end some day, the enjoyment of its comforts cannot become eternal under the law of nature. Therefore, by adding the caveat: *إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى* (for a given time), it has been stressed that the 'good things to enjoy' in the present world will be available up to a particular time, that is, the time of death. On the final count, death will eliminate all these things.

But, soon after this 'death,' the life of the other world will begin, and there too, eternal comforts will be available to those who repent and seek forgiveness.

And Sahl ibn 'Abdullāh رحمه الله تعالى said, 'The meaning of 'good things to enjoy' is that one's attention bypasses the created and remains fixed on the Creator.' Some other men of Allah have said, 'The

reality of 'good things to enjoy' is that one remains content with what is available and worries not for what is not.' In other words, one should be satisfied with as much as is within easy reach in this world and should not eat his heart out for what he does not have.

Of the glad tidings given to those who repent and seek forgiveness, the second appears in the following words: **وَيُؤْتِ كُلَّ ذِي فَضْلٍ فَضْلَهُ** (and bestow His added grace on everyone of excellence). Here, the first **فضل** (*faḍl*: excellence) refers to one's good deed, while the second '*faḍl*' denotes Divine grace or bounty, that is, the Paradise. Put simply, the sense is that Allah Ta'ālā shall bless every doer of good deed with His grace, that is, Paradise.

A promise was made of Good Life, both in *Dunyā* and *Ākhirah*, in the first sentence, and of everlasting blessings of Paradise, in the second. After that, it was said: **فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ كَبِيرٍ** (And if you turn away, then, I fear for you the punishment of a great day). That is: 'If you turn away from the good counsel given to you, fail to seek forgiveness for your past sins, and fail to remain safe against sins in the future, then, there is a strong likelihood that you will be seized by the punishment of a great day'. It refers to the day of *Qiyāmah* for it would be a day of one thousand years and, also in terms of what ominous things would transpire in it, it will be the gravest.

In the fifth verse, the theme has been emphasized further. Let man do what he elects to. Let him live the way he fancies. But, ultimately, once dead, man has to return to Him and He is powerful over everything. It is not at all difficult for Him to have each particle man is made of reassembled after he is dead and becomes dust and see to it that there rises the man he was, all over again.

The sixth verse carries a refutation of what the hypocrites and the disbelievers do. They try to camouflage their hostility, and their antagonistic activism against the Holy Prophet **صلى الله عليه وسلم**, as deftly as they could. Their hearts blaze with malice and enmity but they maintain a cool front, find all sorts of covers to hide their true identity and intention and surmise that no one would find out who they were really and what they were doing actually. But, the truth of the matter is that Allah Ta'ālā knows it all, that which they let come out in the open and that which they conceal behind all sorts of clothes, covers and curtains: **إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ** because, 'He is All Aware of [even] what lies in the

hearts.'

Verses 6 - 8

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا وَيَعْلَمُ
مُسْتَقَرَّهَا وَمُسْتَوْدَعَهَا كُلُّ فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٦﴾ وَهُوَ الَّذِي
خَلَقَ السَّمُوتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ وَكَانَ عَرْشُهُ عَلَى الْمَاءِ
لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَلَئِنْ قُلْتُمْ إِنَّكُمْ مَبْعُوثُونَ مِنْ
بَعْدِ الْمَوْتِ لَيَقُولَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٧﴾
وَلَئِنْ أَخَّرْنَا عَنْهُمُ الْعَذَابَ إِلَى أُمَّةٍ مَعْدُودَةٍ لَيَقُولُنَّ
مَا يَجْبُسُهُ إِلَّا يَوْمَ يَأْتِيهِمْ لَيْسَ مَصْرُوفًا عَنْهُمْ وَحَاقَ بِهِمْ
مَا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿٨﴾

And there is no creature on earth whose sustenance is not on Allah. And He knows its permanent and its temporary place. Everything is in a clear book. [6]

And He is the One who created the heavens and the earth in six days and His throne was on water so that He might test you as to who among you is better in deed. And if you say, "you shall be raised after death," the disbelievers will surely say, "This is nothing but sheer magic." [7]

And if We defer the punishment for them for a certain time, they shall say, "What is holding it back?" Beware, the day it visits them, it shall not be turned back from them and they shall be besieged by what they used to ridicule. [8]

Commentary

Mentioned in the previous verse was the all-encompassing knowledge of Allah Ta'ālā from whom nothing is hidden, nothing from the tiniest particle of the universe down to the secrets of the hearts. It is in consonance with it that the first verse (6) mentions a great favor bestowed on human beings – that Allah Ta'ālā has Himself taken the responsibility of providing their sustenance. Then, this is not restricted to human beings alone. It extends to every living form that walks over

the earth. Its sustenance reaches it where it lives or goes to. That being the state of affairs, the intentions and efforts of disbelievers and hypocrites to hide things from Allah Ta'ālā are nothing but ignorance and senselessness. Then, taken in a general sense, it would include all beasts, birds, insects and all animals of the land and the sea. To intensify this generality, the word: من (*min*) has been added and the text reads: وَمِنْ ذَاتِ (and there is no creature). *Dābbah* is any creature that moves on earth. Birds are also included there because their nests are also located somewhere on the land. That creatures living in water have also a connection with the surface of the earth is no secret. Allah Ta'ālā has taken the responsibility of providing sustenance for all these life forms and has put it in words which give the impression of a duty imposed on someone. It was said: عَلَى اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا (its sustenance is on Allah). It is obvious that there is no power that could put a liability on Allah Ta'ālā. What really happened is that Allah Ta'ālā himself has made this promise out of his grace and mercy. But, this promise comes from One who is True and Merciful. There is no probability of things happening otherwise, counter to the promise. This is a matter of certitude. It is to express this element of certitude that the word: عَلَى ('*alā*: on) has been introduced at this place – a word used to describe duties, although, Allah Ta'ālā takes no orders from anyone, nor is He responsible for something as obligated or necessary.

Lexically, رِزْق *rizq* (sustenance, provision or livelihood) means something from which a creature procures its food and through which the body grows and the soul survives.

According to the lexical meaning of the word '*rizq*', it is not necessary that whoever has it should also be its owner – because, *rizq* is given to all animals, but they are not its owners. They are not cut out for ownership. Similarly, infants are not the owners of their *rizq*, but it is given to them.

In terms of this general sense of *rizq*, 'Ulamā' have said that *rizq* could be *ḥalāl* (lawful) and it could also be *ḥarām* (unlawful), because for a person who eats up what belongs to the other person, that property, no doubt, becomes his food, but so it becomes only unlawfully. Had this person not used unfair means blinded by his greed, he would have received the *ḥalāl* (lawful) *rizq* reserved and appointed for him.

Removal of a doubt against the Divine Responsibility of *Rizq*

A question arises at this stage. When Allah Ta'ālā has taken the responsibility of providing food for every creature, why is it that there are many animals and human beings who die of hunger and thirst for the reason that they do not get food or water? The 'Ulamā have given several answers.

One possible answer is that the responsibility of *rizq* is there until comes the appointed time, that is, until comes the end of the years of life. When these years are over, one has to die, pass away from this world, the common causes of which are diseases, or accidents like burning, drowning, injury and wounds. Similarly, there could also be the reason that the *rizq* for the incumbent was stopped and which caused death.

Imām al-Qurṭubī, under his comments on this verse, has mentioned an event related to Abū Mūsā, Abū Mālīk and some others from their tribe of Banū al-Ash'ar. When these people reached the blessed city of Madīnah after their Hijrah, the wherewithal of their journey was all used up. They sent one of their men to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in the hope that he would make some arrangement for their meals. When this person reached his door, he heard the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم reciting the verse: وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا (And there is no creature on earth whose sustenance is not on Allah - 6). Hearing this verse, the person, thought that Allah has Himself taken the responsibility of providing *rizq* for all life forms, human or non-human, then, we Ash'arites too would not be any worse than the animals in the sight of Allah. He shall, most certainly, give us our *rizq*. With this thought in his mind, he turned from the door and left. He simply said nothing to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم about why he was there. After having returned to his tribe, he said, 'Rejoice, my friends. The help of Allah is coming for you.' His Ash'arī companions took his words in a different sense. They thought that their emissary sent to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was talking about the success of his visit and that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had promised to make arrangements for what they needed. Naturally, they found the news good and felt satisfied. Hardly had they sat down when they saw two men bringing a trencher, a large wooden tray, full of meat and bread. The carriers gave all this food to the Ash'arites who ate it to their fill. When food was still

left, they thought it would be nice to send the rest of the food to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم so that he could use it as he deemed fit. They had two of their men carry this food to the Holy Prophet ﷺ.

Later they all presented themselves before the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and told him, 'Yā Rasūlallāh, the food you sent was very nice and very delicious.' He said, 'As for me, I never sent any food.'

Then, they told him the whole story that they had sent one of their men to him, the reply that he gave led them to believe that the food was sent by him. Hearing this, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, 'not by me, this was sent by the Most Sacred Being who has taken the responsibility of providing *rizq* to every living creature.'

According to some Ḥadīth reports, when Sayyidnā Mūsā عليه السلام reached the Mount of Tūr in search of fire, what he found there was not fire but Divine light. He was made a prophet and asked to go to Egypt so that the Pharaoh and his people could be brought on the right path. At that hour, it occurred to him that he had left his wife in a wilderness all alone – who would take care of her? To remove this scruple from his heart, Allah Ta'ālā asked Sayyidnā Mūsā عليه السلام to strike his rod at the rock in front of him. When he did what he was asked to do, the rock split and out came yet another rock. He was asked to strike his rod at that too. He did that, the rock split and out came the third rock from it. He was asked to strike his rod at that too. It split and coming out from it he saw a creature holding a green leaf in his mouth.

No doubt, Sayyidnā Mūsā عليه السلام believed in the perfect power of Allah Ta'ālā even before, but what one sees with one's eyes has an effect of its own. So, when Sayyidnā Mūsā عليه السلام saw this, he took off for Egypt right from that spot. He did not even stop to tell his wife that he had been commanded to leave for Egypt and that he was going there.

Rizq for All: The Divine System is Unique

After having made the promise in this verse that Allah Ta'ālā has taken the responsibility of providing the *rizq* of every living creature, things have not been left at that. Instead, to put human beings further at ease, it was said: وَيَعْلَمُ مُسْتَقَرَّهَا وَمُسْتَوْدَعَهَا (and He knows its permanent and its temporary place – 6). Different explanations of the words: *مستقر*

(*mustaqarr*) and مستودع (*mustawda'*) have been reported but, lexically, what Tafsīr al-Kashshāf carries is the closest. It says that *mustaqarr* is the place someone makes a permanent residence, or home; and *mustawda'* is a place where one stays temporarily to take care of something (as it appears in the translation of the text).

The sense being driven home is that the responsibility of Allah Ta'ālā should not be taken on the analogy of responsibilities as assumed by peoples and governments of the world of our experience. Here in this world, let us assume that there is a person or institution that would take the responsibility of delivering your '*rizq*' to you. In that case, if you were going somewhere, you would inform that individual or institution that you were leaving your permanent place to go somewhere else. Then, you will have to give a firm itinerary that you will be living in such and such city or village, from such and such date to such and such date, and that you wanted your provider to deliver your *rizq* there! But, when things are 'on Allah' and under His responsibility, you do not have to take even this much of trouble because He knows when you move and He knows when you do not and He knows what you are doing in this or that state. He knows where you live permanently and He knows where you live temporarily. He needs no application, or advice or address to take care of your *rizq*. It is just delivered wherever you are.

In view of the all-encompassing knowledge and perfect power of Allah Ta'ālā, only His will would have been sufficient to make everything come out right – without the need to maintain a log book or master file of work done. But, the only analogy weak man has is the analogy of the system he is used to, therefore, he could have apprehensions of possible errors and omissions. So, for his peace of mind, it was said: كُلُّ شَيْءٍ فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ (Everything is in a clear book). This 'clear book' means the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*) which has a universal coverage with full details of the sustenance, age, deed and things like that and which are entrusted with concerned angels as and when needed.

As narrated by Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar رضى الله عنه and reported in the Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, 'Allah Ta'ālā had written the destinies of all His creation fifty thousand years even before the creation of the heavens and the earth.'

A lengthy Ḥadīth narrated by Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd رضى الله عنه

عنه, appearing in al-Bukhārī and Muslim, reports the saying of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم which is summarized as follows: 'Man goes through different stages before his birth. When the parts of his body are formed completely, Allah Ta'ālā commands an angel who writes down four things about him. One: Deeds he will do. Two: Years of life. Even recorded there is the month, day, minute and breath count. Three: Death: Where would he die and where would he be buried? Four: *Rizq*: How much is his sustenance and how and where does it have to reach him?' (And that it stands written in the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*) even before the creation of the heavens and the earth is not contrary to this).

Another manifestation of the all-encompassing knowledge and perfect power of Allah Ta'ālā has been mentioned in the second verse (7) – 'And He is the One who created the heavens and the earth in six days and (before creating these) His throne was on water.'

This tells us that water was created before the creation of the heavens and the earth. As for the elaboration of the creation of the heavens and the earth in six days, it has appeared in Sūrah Hā Mīm as-Sajdah (also called Sūrah Fuṣṣilat). There it has been said that the earth was created in two days, mountains, river streams, trees and means for the sustenance and survival of living creatures in two days, then, the seven heavens in two days – 41:9-12).

According to Tafsīr Mazḥarī, heavens mean everything high and above and the earth means down and below. Day is the measure of time which, after the creation of the heavens and the earth, is from sunrise to sunset – although, at the time of the creation of the heavens and the earth, neither did the sun exist nor its rising and setting.

It was also within the perfect power of Allah Ta'ālā to create all these things in the flash of a moment but, in His infinite wisdom, He has made the system of this world gradual which is suitable for human temperament.

The purpose of the creation of the heavens and the earth has been identified at the end of the verse by saying: *يَبْلُغُكُمْ أَنتُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا* (So that He might test you as to who among you is better in deed).

This tells us that the creation of the heavens and the earth was not the main purpose. The fact is that these were created for human be-

ings who act right, do better and, along with it, also make the best use of what has been placed therein to run their lives. Finally, it is expected of them that they would ponder over these and would not miss to recognize their Master and Lord (the *Mālik*, the *Rabb*).

The outcome is that human beings are the real purpose of the creation of the heavens and the earth. However, human beings are not all alike. Among them there are those who believe and have faith. Then, even among the later, there is someone, a man or a woman, who is the best in deeds. And it goes without saying that, among the progeny of Sayyidnā Ādam عليه السلام, the best in deeds is our Rasūl, on him the blessing of Allah, and peace. Therefore, it is correct to say that the real purpose of creating the entire universe is to bless it with the generous presence of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم (serving as a model right through the Last Day). (Maẓharī)

There is something we should also take note of. Allah Ta‘ālā said: *أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا* (who among you is better in deed). He has said nothing about the number of deeds. From here we learn that Allah Ta‘ālā favors the quality of deed more than He does the abundance or profusion or frequency of good deeds such as, Ṣalāh, Ṣawm, Tilāwah of Qur’ān and Dhikr of Allah. This beauty or excellence of deeds has been expressed through the word: *إحسان* (*iḥsān*) in Ḥadīth. Essentially, it means the doing of a deed for the good pleasure of Allah alone with no worldly motive attached to it. Then, it is also necessary to do it in a way that is liked in the sight of Allah. This way has been demonstrated by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم through his conduct and he has made it necessary for his community to follow his Sunnah. In a nutshell, we can say that a little done with total sincerity and according to Sunnah is better than a lot more done with none, or less of the two.

Described in the seventh verse is the condition of those who denied that there was to be a Last Day and a Hereafter. Like chronic deniers of the truth, when they do not understand (or do not want to understand) something, they would dismiss it as nothing but magic.

In the eighth verse, an answer has been given to people who doubted the warnings of punishment given by prophets, peace be on them. Not willing to believe them, they used to ask them if they were true, and if they were, why the punishment they warned them of would not come?

Verses 9 - 14

وَلَيْنَ آذَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنَّا رَحْمَةً ثُمَّ نَزَعْنَاهَا مِنْهُ إِنَّهُ لَكَفُورٌ ﴿٩﴾ وَلَيْنَ آذَقْنَاهُ نِعْمَاءَ بَعْدَ ضَرَاءٍ مَسَّتْهُ لِيَقُولَنَّ ذَهَبَ السَّيِّئَاتُ عَنِّي إِنَّهُ لَفَرِحٌ فَخُورٌ ﴿١٠﴾ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾ فَلَعَلَّكَ تَارِكٌ بَعْضَ مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيْكَ وَضَائِقٌ بِهِ صَدْرُكَ أَنْ يَقُولُوا لَوْلَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَيْهِ كُتُبٌ أَوْ جَاءَ مَعَهُ مَلَكٌ ۖ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ نَذِيرٌ ۖ وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَكِيلٌ ﴿١٢﴾ أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ ۖ قُلْ فَأْتُوا بِعَشْرِ سُوْرٍ مِّثْلِهِ مُفْتَرِيَاتٍ ۖ وَادْعُوا مَنِ اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿١٣﴾ فَإِلَّمْ يَسْتَجِيبُوا لَكُمْ فَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا أُنْزِلَ بِعِلْمِ اللَّهِ وَأَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ فَهَلْ أُنْتُمْ مُّسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

And if We give man a taste of mercy from Us and then take it away from him, he is then utterly desperate, ungrateful. [9]

And if We give him a taste of comfort after he has suffered from some hardship, he shall say, "Evils have gone away from me." He is, then, over-exulting, arrogant, [10] except those who are patient and do good deeds. Those are the people for whom there is forgiveness and a great reward. [11]

It is then expected of you that you will abandon some of what is being revealed to you and that your heart will be straitened thereby, because they say, "Why has a treasure not been sent down to him or an angel not come with him?" You are but a warner. And Allah takes care of everything. [12]

What? Do they say that he has fabricated it? Say, "Then bring ten sūrahs like it, fabricated. And call whomsoever you can, other than Allah, if you are true." [13]

So, if they do not respond to you, then be sure that it has been sent down with the knowledge of Allah and

that there is no god but He. So, do you submit? [14]

Commentary

In the verses appearing above, it has been confirmed that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is a Messenger of Allah and an answer has been given to those who engineer doubts about it. At the beginning, in the first three verses (9-11), an instinctively bad human habit has been mentioned with an instruction to Muslims that they should stay away from it.

That man is naturally fickle-minded and haste-prone, and that he tends to be consumed by his immediate condition and puts all concerns of the past and future out of his mind, has been described in the first two verses (9,10). It has been said: 'If We let man taste a blessing and then take it back, he loses courage and hope and turns ungrateful. And if We let him taste a blessing after he has suffered from some hardship, he forgets all about his suffering and starts bragging and boasting.

In other words, man is given to hurry things, takes the present as everything, does not bother to refer to the past or show concern for the future, therefore, a suffering after a blessing makes him lose hope and slide into ungratefulness. He never thinks that Allah who blessed him first could bless him again. Similarly, if one gets comfort after suffering, then he, rather than recall his past suffering, turn to Allah and be grateful to Him, starts waxing more proud and arrogant. In that state, he forgets his past and goes about thinking that Allah's blessings were his right, he has to have these, and that he remains under the impression that this was how he would continue for the rest of his life. So heedless he becomes that it just does not occur to him that the way the days of suffering did not continue any more, the same thing could happen to the days of comfort and they too could vanish.

Such is the state of human worship of the present and so tragic is the penchant for forgetting the past and the present that a power-hungry man would not even blink to raise the edifice of his power on the blood and dust of another man of power. Always looking up, he would never look down to recall that this had been the fate of the man of power before him. Sad ends and ill fates make no effect on him for power in the present tastes good.

When people start worshipping the present and elect to remain drunk with the state they are in, that is high time for Books of Allah and His Messengers to come. When they do, they bring the lesson-oriented events of the past into sharp focus for heedless man to see things in this perspective and have a little concern for what would happen to them in the future. The lesson they teach is: Ponder over the changing conditions of the universe you are in and get to know the power working behind these – great sermonizers from the Lord!

A perfect believer, in fact, a perfect human being is one who is able to perceive the hidden Power behind every change, revolution, sorrow and comfort, ignore their transitory phases, dismiss their material causes as the sole explanation. The mark of an intelligent person is that he looks at the originator or causer of causes more than he would look at causes, and it is with Him alone that he would relate to as firmly as possible.

In order to make such perfect models of humanity distinct from those having common human temperament, it was said in the third verse (11): *إِلَّا الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ* (except those who are patient and do good deeds). It means that people exempted from this common human frailty have two qualities: *Ṣabr* (patience) and *al-ʿAmal aṣ-Ṣāliḥ* (good deeds).

The word: *صبر* (*ṣabr*) is used to convey a much wider range of meanings in the Arabic language, much wider than conveyed by its translation as 'patience' in English. The real meaning of *ṣabr* is to tie, check, stop or hold back. In the terminology of the Qurʾān and Sunnah, to hold the desiring human self back from going for the impermissible is *Ṣabr*. Therefore, the sense of *Ṣabr* (patience) includes abstention from all sins and doings counter to the dictates of the Shariʿah and *al-ʿAmal aṣ-Ṣāliḥ* (good deeds) covers all that is obligatory (*farḍ*), necessary (*wājib*), Sunnah and recommended (*mustaḥabb*). The verse now comes to mean that there are people who will not be affected by common human weaknesses. This will happen because they would have faith in Allah and they would fear the reckoning of the Last Day of *Qiyāmah*. They will abstain from everything disliked by Allah and His Rasūl and race towards every deed that brings their pleasure.

At the end of this very verse, also identified there is the recompense of these perfect human beings: *أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ* (Those are the

people for whom there is forgiveness and a great reward – 11)

At this place, it should be noted that the Holy Qur'ān uses the word: **اذتقا** (*adhaqnā*: We give them a taste of) for blessing and suffering both. By this device, it was indicated that real blessing and suffering is that of the Hereafter. Neither is the comfort of the mortal world the whole of it, nor is its suffering the whole of it. Instead of that, it should be taken at the level of tasting and sampling so that human beings could have some idea of the blessings and sufferings of the Hereafter. Therefore, neither are the comforts of this world something to be happy about unnecessarily, nor are its sufferings something to grieve about too much. If you were to think, this whole world is, to borrow a commercial term, only a showroom of the Hereafter with sample displays of comfort and suffering.

The fourth verse (12) has been revealed about a particular event. What happened was that the Mushriks of Makkah placed a host of demands before the Holy Prophet **صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم**. One of these was, 'our idols have been maligned in this Qur'ān, therefore, we cannot believe in it. So, you should either bring some other Qur'ān, or improve it by making alterations in it: **إِنْتِ بُقْرَانِ غَيْرِ هَذَا أَزِيدُ لَهُ** (Bring a Qur'ān other than this, or change it – Yūnus, 10:15)'. (Al-Baghawī, Mazharī)

Another demand they came up with was, 'we are to believe in your prophesy only when some treasure, like the treasures of the kings of the world, is sent down for you and which you dole out to everyone around. Or that some angel descends from the heavens and hangs out with you everywhere testifying that you were a Messenger of Allah in all certainty.'

The Holy Prophet **صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم** felt the pinch of these absurd, even disrespectfully audacious demands in his heart. The reason was that he was mercy for all the worlds. It was not possible for him to leave them to their fate and take out the hope that they might someday believe from his heart. Nor was it possible for him to fulfill their absurd demands. To begin with, these demands were based on bland irrationality. If idols, idol-worship and things like that are not called what they are, what would become of right guidance and how would it be done? And then this brain wave of demanding a treasure from a prophet was a loud miss-match with his mission. They had simply taken the station of a prophet on the analogy of the status of a king. Simi-

larly, it is not the practice of Allah Ta'ālā that He would create conditions under which people were materially compelled to start professing the Faith. Otherwise, the whole world is within His power and control. Who could dare profess a belief, and act according to it, against the will of Allah Ta'ālā? But, it is in His infinite wisdom that He has made this world a place of test. No material means are used here to compel people to do something good or to abstain from something bad. Certainly, what is done here is through Scriptures and Apostles. Lines are drawn between virtue and vice. Good and bad are separated. The outcome of each is explained. That is how people are invited and exhorted to do what is right and abstain from what is evil. And if some angel were to be miraculously attached to a prophet to attest to the veracity of his word, it would have posed problems. When no one believed it, he would have faced cash punishment on the spot. In that case, this would have been a modality of compelling people to believe. This kind of belief would have not been believing without seeing which is the essence of belief and faith, nor would there be any choice left for man to make which is the essence of his deed. As for the demands of those people, they were, no doubt, absurd and audacious. But, there is another aspect to it. The very act of making such demands proved that these people were grossly unaware of the status and reality of a messenger and prophet of Allah. They saw no difference between Allah and His Messenger. They even took the messenger to be absolutely powerful like Allah, therefore, they demanded that he should do for them what could not be done by anyone other than Allah.

In brief, when the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم became very sad because of such demands, this verse was revealed to comfort him and to revitalize his thinking. Addressing him first, it was said: Would you – surrendering to the pressure of these people – leave out some part of the Qur'ān, sent by Allah, which they do not like, such as a part where it talks about the utter helplessness of idols? Would you, then, still be disturbed in the face of such demands? The introduction of the statement in verse 12 with the word: **لَعَلَّكَ** (*la'allaka*: Is it then expected of you) does not mean that something like that could be expected of him actually. Instead, the purpose is to establish that he was free from such things. He would not leave out any part of the Qur'ān in consideration of their insistence, nor does he have to be sad, concerned and straitened over their demands. The reason is that he has been sent

from Allah as *nadhīr*, as one who warns people against what is harmful for them, then, Allah takes care of the rest for He is powerful over everything. *Nadhīr* has been mentioned here particularly because those being addressed were *kāfirs*, and *kāfirs* deserve nothing but warning against the consequences of their deeds. Otherwise, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is not simply *nadhīr*, one who warns, he is *bashīr* too, one who announces glad tidings for people who do good deeds. In addition to what has been said here about the mission of a *nadhīr*, we should understand that, in reality, *nadhīr* is a person who warns out of love and affection against what is evil and harmful. Therefore, in a way, the sense of *bashīr*, a giver of glad tidings, is included in the sense of *nadhīr*, a giver of warning.

In the cited verses, the Mushriks had demanded the kind of miracles they chose. Verses that follow tell them that they already have a miracle, the miracle of the Qur'ān shown at the hands of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم before them, a miracle even they could not deny. Now if they were demanding these miracles honestly, only to determine the veracity of the messenger of Allah, then, their demand stands accepted (and the miracle is on). And if this demand is simply to gratify their hostility, the showing of miracles demanded by them would remain redundant, for who could expect from such hostile people that they would embrace Islām, even after having seen those miracles. So, the essential point is that the Holy Qur'ān is a clear miracle that cannot be denied.

A refutation of the false doubts engineered by Mushriks and Kāfirs in it has been made in the next two verses (13,14): These people say that the Prophet of Islam has himself made up the Qur'ān – it is no book of Allah.

In answer, it was said: If you really think so, that Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم can make a Qur'ān like this, all by himself, then, you too, better come up with only ten Sūrahs like that. And it is not necessary either that these ten Sūrahs have to be made by any one person. Instead, let everyone in the world join forces and come up with it. And when they fail to make even ten Sūrahs, then, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was to tell them: Now the reality stands out loud and clear, for had this Qur'ān been the word of some human being, other human beings could have also been able to make something like this. And that

they all fail to do so is a strong proof of the fact that this Qur'an has been revealed only with the knowledge of Allah in which there is no room for the least increase or decrease and that it is beyond human power.

At this place, the Holy Qur'an has said that they should come up with ten Sūrahs like it. And in another verse it was also said: 'Then, bring a Sūrah the like of this – al-Baqarah, 2:23.'

The reason is that they were first asked to bring ten Sūrahs. They failed to do so. Then, to make their inability look more pronounced, it was said in the verse of Sūrah al-Baqarah quoted above: If you take the Qur'an to be a word of man, then, you too, bring no more than just one Sūrah being the like of it. But, despite this challenge of the Qur'an, made so easy for them, they could do nothing. It stood proved that the Holy Qur'an was a miracle, and the Word of Allah without any doubt. Therefore, at the end, it was said: *فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُّسْلِمُونَ*, that is, 'would you now believe and obey, or would you prefer to remain heedless as before?'

Verses 15 – 17

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتَهَا نُوَفِّ إِلَيْهِمْ أَعْمَالَهُمْ فِيهَا وَهُمْ فِيهَا لَا يُبْخَسُونَ ﴿١٥﴾ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ لَيْسَ لَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا النَّارُ وَحَبِطَ مَا صَنَعُوا فِيهَا وَبَطُلَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٦﴾ أَفَمَنْ كَانَ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّهِ وَيَتْلُوهُ شَاهِدٌ مِّنْهُ وَمِنْ قَبْلِهِ كُتِبَ مُوسَىٰ إِمَامًا وَرَحْمَةً ۖ أُولَٰئِكَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ ۖ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِهِ مِنَ الْأَحْزَابِ فَالنَّارُ مَوْعِدُهُ ۚ فَلَا تَكُ فِي مِرْيَةٍ مِّنْهُ ۚ إِنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكَ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

Those who have been intending (to achieve) the worldly life and its beauty, We shall fully recompense them herein for their acts, and herein they shall not be given less. [15] Those are the people for whom there is nothing in the Hereafter except fire. And nullified is what they have worked herein and void is what they have been doing. [16]

So, what about the one who is on a clear path, and there comes after it evidence from within and, before

it, the Book of Mūsā, a guide and a mercy? Such people believe in it. And whoever of the groups disbelieves it, then, Fire is his promised place. So, do not be in doubt about it. Surely, it is the truth from your Lord but most of people do not believe. [17]

Commentary

When warnings of punishment were given to opponents of Islam, they referred to the charities they contributed to and the social welfare work they did. With this testimonial of good deeds in their hands, why would they be punished? It is interesting that, in our time too, there are a lot of unaware Muslims who seem to be suffering from the same doubt. They look at disbelieving non-Muslims who impart a good image of their outward deeds and morals, are active in social work, give out in charities, and make roads, bridges, hospitals, free drinking water counters. This view leads them to hold the opinion that they were better than Muslims. This has been answered in the first (15) of the three verses cited above.

In gist, the answer is that every deed, in order to be accepted as a source of salvation in the Hereafter, must fulfill the first condition of absolute sincerity – that this deed should have been done for the sake of Allah. And the only valid way of doing it for Allah is that it is done in accordance with the way taught and shown in practice by His Messenger. A person who simply does not believe in Allah and His Messenger is a person the sum total of whose deeds and morals is a skeleton without soul. It may look handsome (even slim) but because it has no soul or spirit, it has no weight or effect in the home of the Hereafter. Yes, the contribution of such a person in the mortal world has benefited people. At least in terms of its outward form, what he had done was good, therefore, Allah, the Lord Almighty has, in consideration of His supreme equity and justice, not allowed this deed to go to waste totally. Instead, things were arranged in terms of the objectives the doers of these deeds had before them. If they had worked for recognition in society or an image as philanthropist, man of charity, goodwill or distinction, or had simply aspired for health and material wealth and comfort, Allah Ta‘ālā lets them have all this right here in this world. They had no concept of the Hereafter. They had never cared to think of salvation there, nor their deeds, being without the essential spirit, could have qualified them to become deserving of it.

Therefore, no return waits for them there, against their deeds, while the added burden of disbelief and disobedience will keep them in Hell. This was a gist of what was said in the first verse. Now, we can have a look at some of the words used there.

It was said that a person who kept striving for the life of this world and its embellishments gets from Allah the full return for his or her deeds right here in this world. For them, nothing is cut short in *Dun-yā*. These are the kind of men and women for whom there is nothing in *Ākhirah* (Hereafter), except the Hell.

It is noteworthy at this point that the expression opted for in the Qur'an is: مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ (those who have been intending) which bypasses something brief like: مَنْ أَرَادَ (those who wanted). The Qur'anic expression denotes continuity and carries the sense of 'kept striving for' as translated a little earlier. This tells us that it is the condition of people who never wanted to have anything out of what they did but the good of this world. They just never bothered to worry about what would happen in the life to come. As for the person who feels concerned about the Hereafter and does what would bring salvation there and, along with it aims and plans to have his share from the world, then, it is not included in the purview of this verse.

Is this verse related to *kāfirs* or Muslims or to both Muslims and *kāfirs*? Major authorities in Tafsīr differ about it.

The words in the last sentence of the verse – for whom there is nothing in the Hereafter except the fire of Hell – seem to suggest that it is related to *kāfirs*, because a Muslim, no matter how sinning, would ultimately go to Paradise after having undergone the punishment of sins. Therefore, Ḍaḥḥāk and other commentators have interpreted it as related to *kāfirs* only.

Some commentators have said that it refers to Muslims who, through their good deeds, aim to acquire only the comfort, wealth and recognition from this worldly life. In other words, they do their good deeds with the sole intention of having comfort and recognition in the world they live in. And the sentence we are talking about would thus mean that, until they undergo the punishment of their evil deeds, they would have nothing except the fire of Hell.

However, the weightier and clearer approach is to take this verse

as relating to people who do their good deeds only with the intention of acquiring worldly benefits, such as wealth, health and recognition. Those who do so may be *kāfīrs* or disbelievers who do not believe in the Hereafter from the very outset. Or, they may be Muslims who believe in the Hereafter theoretically but do not apply their belief to what they do practically. In fact, they would keep all concerns of their life exclusively attached to worldly benefits and interests. From among the early commentators, Mujāhid, Maimūn ibn Mihrān and Sayyidnā Mu'āwiyah رضى الله عنه have gone by this view.

This meaning is also supported by the well-known Ḥadīth of the Holy Prophet ﷺ (إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ : (Actions are [judged] according to Intentions). What one intends to have by his action gets exactly that. Whoever intends to have *Dunyā* (worldly benefits) gets *Dunyā*. Whoever intends to have *Ākhirah* gets *Ākhirah*. Whoever intends to have both gets both. That all actions depend on intention is a principle approved of in every community and religion. (Qurtubī)

Therefore, says a Ḥadīth, those who devoted themselves to acts of worship in the mortal world to look respectable before others will be brought forth on the day of *Qiyāmah*. It would be said to them: 'you said your prayers, gave in charity, fought in Jihād, recited the Qur'ān, but you did all that with the intention that you should be known as devotees to prayers, givers in charity, veteran warriors of Jihād and great reciters of Qur'ān. Now you have had what you wanted to have. The honors you were looking for have already come to you in the mortal world. Now, there is no return for your deeds here. And these people will be the first to be thrown into the Hell.'

While reporting this Ḥadīth, Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضى الله عنه broke into tears and said, 'the verse of the Qur'an: مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتَهَا (Those who have been intending (to achieve) the worldly life and its beauty – 15) confirms this Ḥadīth.

Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim reports on the authority of Sayyidnā Anas رضى الله عنه that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, 'Allah Ta'ālā does no injustice to anyone. For the good deed a believer does, he gets some return for it in the mortal world while gets the real reward in the Hereafter. As for a *kāfīr* (since he does not bother about what would happen to him in the Hereafter), his account is cleared within his life in the mortal world. The return for his good deeds, if any, is given to him in the form

of worldly wealth, recognition, health and comfort – until comes the time when he reaches the stage of the Hereafter where he is left with nothing that could bring any return there.

It appears in Tafsīr Maḥḥarī that, though a believer looks forward to having prosperity in the mortal world as well, but his intention to have the best of the Hereafter remains on top of everything. Therefore, he gets what he does in the mortal world only to the measure of his needs. However, he does get the larger return and reward in the Hereafter.

Sayyidnā ‘Umar رضى الله عنه once visited the home of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. When he saw virtually nothing in the house but a few things here and there, he said to him: ‘please pray that Allah Ta‘ālā blesses your *Ummah* too with extended material means. We see Persia and Byzantine. They are very prosperous in this world although they do not worship Allah Ta‘ālā.’ The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was reclining on a pillow behind his waist. When he heard these words of Sayyidnā ‘Umar رضى الله عنه, he sat up straight and said, ‘O ‘Umar, you are still lost in those thoughts. As for these people, they are the ones who have been given the return of their good deeds right here in this world.’ (Maḥḥarī)

Jāmi‘ Tirmidhī and the Musnad of Aḥmad report on the authority of Sayyidnā Anas رضى الله عنه that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, ‘Whoever intends to have (the best of) the Hereafter through his deeds, Allah Ta‘ālā makes his heart need-free in this world. He (Himself) takes care of what he must have, and (the desire of) the world comes to him all humbled. And whoever intends to have (the best of) the present world, Allah Ta‘ālā makes want and need stand before him to the effect that they can never shake them off. There is no end to his needs because he is constantly being driven by worldly greed. No sooner does one need gets fulfilled, another gaping need stands before him. Countless concerns gang upon him but what he gets is what Allah Ta‘ālā has written for him.

Regarding what has been said in this verse: ‘those who aimed for worldly life are fully recompensed for their deeds within this world,’ someone may raise a doubt. It could be said that there are many people who, despite aiming and striving to have worldly benefits, fail to achieve their objective even in this world and, on occasions, they would

get just about nothing. The answer is that, in this verse, the Qur'ān has dealt with the subject briefly. Details appear in the following verse of Sūrah al-Isrā' (Banī Isrā'īl) where it was said: مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَّلْنَا لَهُ فِيهَا مَا شَاءَ مِنْ نِعْمَتِنَا (whoever keeps aspiring for the immediate, We shall give soon what We will to whom We will). It means whoever keeps aiming for nothing but worldly life, Allah gives it to him right here within the world, but this giving is restricted by two conditions. Firstly, He gives as much as He wants. It is not necessary to let them have what matches their desires. Secondly, He gives only to a person it is appropriate to give him according to His wisdom. Giving to everyone is not necessary.

The second verse (17) presents the high ground the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and the purely sincere believers with him occupy. This is in sharp contrast to those the sum total of whose knowledge and the end of whose quest is restricted to worldly life only – so that the whole world could see that these two groups could not be equal. After having focused on this phenomena, it has been stated that the mission and message of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم as a prophet and messenger of Allah is open to mankind right through the Last Day of *Qiyāmah*. Then, it has been stressed that anyone who does not believe in him will be considered, irrespective of what one does, astray and Hell-bound.

In the first sentence, it was asked: Can a denier of the Qur'ān be equal to the one who adheres to the Qur'ān that has come from his Lord? And along with it there is a witness present within it, while a witness earlier to this is the Book of Mūsā عليه السلام that was sent to be followed and to be mercy for people?

The word: *bayyinah* (بينه) appearing in this verse refers to the Qur'ān. As for the meaning of '*shāhid*' (شاهد: evidence), statements of Tafsīr authorities differ. The author of Bayān al-Qur'ān takes '*shāhid*' to mean the miracle of the Qur'ān that is present in the Qur'ān as such. Thus, it comes to mean that those who adhere to the Qur'ān, they already have a witness to the veracity of the Qur'ān within it, that is, its miracle. Then, the other witness has already come in the form of Torah. Sayyidnā Mūsā عليه السلام had brought it as guidance and mercy for people. The reason is that the Torah confirms the truth of the Qur'ān clearly.

In the second sentence, in order to stress that salvation, up to the

Last Day, depends on faith in the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, it has been said that anyone from any religion or community of the world who refuses to have faith in him will have his abode in Jahannam.

The Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim reports on the authority of Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضى الله عنه that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, 'by the One in whose hands rests my life, any Jew or Christian who hears my call and still does not believe in the teachings I have brought, then, he or she will be of the people of Jahannam.'

This should remove the misunderstanding of those who regard the Jews and Christians or the adherents of other religions as being on *ḥaqq* (the truth) on the basis of some outward deeds and consider these to be sufficient for salvation without having faith in the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and the Qur'an. This is an open clash with the present *āyah* of the Holy Qur'an, and the authentic *aḥādīth*. (Allah may save us from that!)

Verses 18 - 24

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا ۖ أُولَٰئِكَ يُعْرَضُونَ عَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ وَيَقُولُ الْأَشْهَادُ هَٰؤُلَاءِ الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا عَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ ۗ أَلَا لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٨﴾ الَّذِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَيَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا ۖ وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ كَافِرُونَ ﴿١٩﴾ أُولَٰئِكَ لَمْ يَكُونُوا مُعْجِزِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا كَانَ لَهُمْ مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ مِن أَوْلِيَاءَ ۚ يُضَعَّفُ لَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ ۖ مَا كَانُوا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ السَّمْعَ وَمَا كَانُوا يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ وَضَلَّ عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿٢١﴾ لَا جَرَمَ أَنَّهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ هُمُ الْأَخْسَرُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَآخَبَتُوا إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾ مَثَلُ الْفَرِيقَيْنِ كَالْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْأَصْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرِ وَالسَّمِيعِ ۗ هَلْ يَسْتَوِينَ مَثَلًا ۖ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

And who is more unjust than the one who forges a lie

against Allah? They shall be presented before their Lord, and the witnesses shall say, "These are the ones who lied against their Lord. Beware, the curse of Allah lies on the unjust, [18] those who prevent (people) from the way of Allah and seek crookedness in it. They, surely they, are disbelievers of the Hereafter." [19]

They were unable to frustrate (Allah's plan) on the earth, and there were no supporters for them besides Allah. Multiplied for them shall be the punishment. They were not able to hear, nor would they see. [20] Those are the ones who brought loss to their own selves, and lost for them was all that they used to fabricate. [21] Invariably, they are the worst losers in the Hereafter. [22]

Surely, those who believe and do good deeds and humble their selves before their Lord – those are the people of Paradise. There they shall live forever. [23]

The example of the two groups is like the one blind and deaf and the one seeing and hearing. Are the two equal when compared? Would you still pay no heed? [24]

Verses 25 – 35

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ إِنِّي لَكُمْ نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٢٥﴾ أَنْ لَا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا اللَّهَ إِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمِ إِلِيمٍ ﴿٢٦﴾ فَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ مَا نَرَاكَ إِلَّا بَشَرًا مِثْلَنَا وَمَا نَرَاكَ اتَّبَعَكَ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ هُمْ أَرَادُوا بُادِي الرَّأْيِ وَمَا نَرَىٰ لَكُمْ عَلَيْنَا مِنْ فَضْلٍ بَلْ نَظُنُّكُمْ كَاذِبِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾ قَالَ يَقَوْمِ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّي وَأَتْنِي رَحْمَةً مِنْ عِنْدِهِ فَعَمِيتَ عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْزِلْكُمْ مَوَاطِنَ أَنْتُمْ لَهَا كَرِهُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾ وَيَقَوْمِ لَا تَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مَا لَاحُظٌ إِنْ أَجْرِي إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ وَمَا أَنَا بِطَارِدٍ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّهُمْ مُُلْقُوا رَبَّهُمْ وَالْكِتَابِ أَرَأَيْتُمْ قَوْمًا تَجْهَلُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾ وَيَقَوْمِ مَنْ يَنْصُرُنِي مِنَ اللَّهِ إِنْ طَرَدْتُهُمْ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ

﴿٢٠﴾ وَلَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ عِنْدِي خَزَائِنُ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ وَلَا
 أَقُولُ إِنِّي مَلَكٌ وَلَا أَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ تَزْدَرِي أَعْيُنُكُمْ لَن يُؤْتِيَهُمُ
 اللَّهُ خَيْرًا ۖ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ ۚ إِنِّي إِذَا لَمِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ
 ﴿٢١﴾ قَالُوا يَنْوُحُ قَدْ جَادَلْتَنَا فَآكُثِرْتَ ۖ جَدَلْنَا فَأِنَّا بِمَا
 تَعِدُنَا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾ قَالَ إِنَّمَا يَأْتِيَكُمْ بِهِ اللَّهُ
 إِنْ شَاءَ وَمَا أَنْتُمْ بِمُعْجِزِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾ وَلَا يَنْفَعُكُمْ نُصْحِي إِنْ
 أَرَدْتُ أَنْ أَنْصَحَ لَكُمْ إِنْ كَانَ اللَّهُ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يُغْوِيَكُمْ
 هُوَ رَبُّكُمْ ۖ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾ أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ ۖ قُلْ إِنْ
 افْتَرَيْتُهُ فَعَلَىٰ إِجْرَامِي وَأَنَا بَرِيءٌ ۖ مِمَّا تَحْمِلُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

And We have sent Nuh to his people (saying to them): "I am, for you, a clear warner, [25] that you worship none but Allah, I fear for you the punishment of a painful day." [26]

So, the chiefs of his people, who disbelieved, said, "We see (that) you are nothing but a man like us. And we do not see you followed by anyone but by the lowest among us who are of shallow opinion, and we do not see in you any superiority over us; rather, think you are liars. [27]

He said, "O my people, tell me when I am on a clear path from my Lord, and He has bestowed mercy upon me from Himself and it has been hidden from your sight. Shall we, then, impose it upon you while you are averse to it? [28] And, O my people, I do not demand from you any wealth for it. My reward is with none but Allah. And I am not to drive the believers away. Surely, they are to meet their Lord, but I see that you are an ignorant people. [29] And, O my people, who will help me against (the punishment of) Allah, if I drive them away? Would you still pay no heed? [30] And I do not say to you that with me are the treasures of Allah, nor do I have the knowledge of the unseen, nor do I say that I am an angel. And I do not say about those who are contemptible in your eyes that Allah will never

award them any good; Allah is the best- knower of what is in their hearts. (If I do so) then, I shall indeed be one of the unjust.” [31]

They said, “O Nūḥ, you have quarreled with us, and quarreled much. Now bring what you threaten us with, if you are one of the truthful.” [32]

He said, “Only Allah will bring it to you, if He so wills, and you cannot frustrate (His will). [33] And my good counsel will not profit you, even though I wish you the best, if Allah wills to make you go astray. He is your Lord and to Him you shall be made to return.” [34]

Do they still say that he has forged it? Say, “If I have forged it, then, upon me is my sin, and I am free of the sins you commit.” [35]

Commentary

When Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام invited his people to believe, they responded with some doubts and objections against the veracity of his mission as a prophet and messenger of Allah. Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام, with the will and permission of Allah, answered their questions. Many primary and subsidiary religious rulings relating to honesty and social living emerge from here as a corollary. This dialogue forms the core of the subject taken up in these verses.

Some questions raised by the disbelievers appear in the third verse (27). Before we take these up, let us first look at the meanings of some of the words there.

The word: *ملا* (*malā*) generally means a group. Some leading lexicographers say that a group of the chiefs of a people is called: *ملا* (*malā*). *Bashar* (بشر) is translated as human being or man. *Arādhil* (اراذل) is the plural form of *ardhal* (ارذل). It means someone lowly, not having any status or respect among his people. The expression: *بادي الرأي* (*badiyar-rāy*) means cursory or shallow opinion.

As for their objections, the first one related to the status of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام as a prophet and messenger: *مَا تَرَكُوا إِلَّا بَشَرًا مِّثْلَنَا* (We see that you are nothing but a man like us). In effect, they were saying that he ate, drank, walked, slept and woke up like them. How then, they questioned, could they accept this extra-ordinary status of his as a messenger and prophet of God?

They thought that the person who is sent to men as a messenger from Allah should not belong to the genus of man, instead, he should be an angel whose distinct status had to be recognized by everyone, willingly or unwillingly.

This was answered in the fourth verse (28) as follows:

يَقُولُ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّي وَأَنْزِلِي رَحْمَةً مِّنْ عِنْدِي فَعَمِيَثْ
عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْزِلُكُمْ مَكْمُوهًا وَأَنْتُمْ لَهَا كَرِهُونَ

He said, "O my people, tell me when I am on a clear path from my Lord, and He has bestowed mercy upon me from Himself and it has been hidden from your sight. Shall we, then, impose it upon you while you are averse to it?"

Here we are being told that for a *rasūl* or messenger to be a man is not contrary to his mission as a prophet or messenger. In fact, a little thought would show that this is how it should be – that the *rasūl* of men should be a man so that men find it comfortable to learn their religion from him. There is an enormous difference in the mental and emotional make up of men and angels. If an angel were to be sent as a *rasūl*, learning religion from him would have become terribly difficult. The reason is that an angel is not hungry or thirsty or sleepy or plain tired, nor does he have to deal with all those human compulsions. How would he have the feeling for such human weaknesses? And, without this feeling, how could men have followed him deed-wise? This theme has appeared in other verses of the Qur'ān, either explicitly or suggestively, at several places. Bypassing these, they were exhorted to use their reason and realize that it was not the least necessary that a prophet and messenger should not be a man. But, what is necessary is that he brings with him some proof, argument and evidence from Allah Ta'ālā that could make it easy for people to accept that he was definitely a *rasūl* sent by Allah. Those open proofs (*bayyinah*) and binding arguments for common people take the form of miracles shown at the hands of prophets. Therefore, Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام said that he had brought with him the clear path, argument and mercy from his Lord. If they had seen it carefully and thought about it, they would not have refused to accept the invitation. But, their aversion and hostility made them blind, hence they opted to deny the truth and became adamant to it.

But, this mercy of Allah Ta‘ālā that comes through a prophet is not something which could be caused to fall over the heads of people – until they themselves show their inclination to have it. There is a hint here that the prophet would have passed on the wealth of ‘Imān he had come with to them, if he could, despite their denial and obstinacy. But, this was against Divine law. A blessing is aspired for. People cannot be compelled to have it. From here it also stands proved that it has never been permissible, in any period of a prophet, that people should be compelled to become believers. Even those who continue to spread the ugly propaganda that Islām was spread by the sword are not themselves unaware of the truth of the matter. But, they find it convenient to use the power of a lie to sow seeds of doubt in the hearts of the ignorant only to keep the torches of their hatred burning.

As a side benefit, it has also become easier to understand why an angel was not made a prophet. The reason is that an angel is endowed with supernatural power. He is way distinct from human beings in every facet of his existence. To see him and then to believe in him would have become an exercise in compulsion. With an angel in front of him, who could dare being obstinate – something so conveniently demonstrated before prophets? Then, according to the dictate of the Shari‘ah, if a person believes unwillingly under the threat of some coercive power, his belief and faith is not acceptable. In fact, the ideally desirable thing is to believe without seeing (*al-‘Imān bi ‘l-ghaib*) – that one believes without having fully observed and witnessed the ultimate subduing power of Allah Ta‘ālā.

The second objection they raised was: وَمَا نُرْكَاتُكَ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ هُمْ أَرَادُوا لَنَا بِأَدْنَى الرَّأْيِ (and we do not see you followed by any one but by the lowest among us who are of shallow opinion – 27). This objection has two aspects: (1) That the people of higher status would have been the first to accept your call, if it was correct and true; and that only such lowly people have accepted it shows that the call itself is not worth accepting. (2) That there is something else that stops us from accepting your call to believe. Suppose we were to believe, then we understand that we too will be taken as Muslims, like them and equal to them and, in rows of prayers as well as in other meetings, we will have to sit with them as equals. This we cannot do.

These people were far from reality and very unaware indeed. Sim-

ply because poor people did not wallow in wealth and pride in office and status, they had elected to berate them as lowly and mundane – although, the thought itself is as ignorant as it can be. Honor and disgrace, reason and understanding are not subservient to wealth and property. Rather, as experience bears out, power and wealth can become intoxicating enough as would stop its possessors from understanding and accepting so many reasonable and correct things. These barriers do not stand before the meek and the poor. They go ahead and accept what is correct and true. This is the reason why the customary Divine practice through the lanes of time gone by has been no other but that the first among those who believe in prophets are none but the weak and the meek. This phenomenon has also been explained in past Scriptures. Pursuant to this, when the blessed letter from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم inviting him to believe reached the Byzantine Emperor, Hiraql, he felt the need to ascertain the truth of the matter – because, he had read the signs of the noble prophets in the Torah and the Injīl. Therefore, he assembled people of Arabia who were visiting Syria at that time and asked them some questions about those signs.

One of these questions was, ‘Are those who follow him the poor and the weak among his people, or those who are considered big and notable among them?’ He was told, ‘They are poor and weak.’ Thereupon, Hiraql confessed, ‘this is sign of his being a true prophet because those who follow prophets initially are these very poor and weak people.’

In short, taking poor people to be lowly was ignorance on their part. In reality, ‘*radhīl*’ or disgraced is he who does not recognize his creator and sustainer and disobeys what He has asked him to do. Therefore, the venerated Sufyān Ibn Sa‘īd Ath-Thawrī, was asked by someone, ‘who is mean and disgraced?’ He said, ‘people who keep flattering rulers and officials.’ And Ibn al-A‘rabī said, ‘mean is he who earns *Dunyā* (benefits of worldly life) by selling his *dīn* (religion).’ Someone asked him, ‘who is the meanest?’ Then, he said, ‘a person who ruins his religion and streamlines the worldly life of someone else.’ Imām Mālik said, ‘mean is he who maligns the noble Companions of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم because they are the greatest benefactors of the entire Muslim Ummah, and the source through which the blessings of *Imān* and *Sharī‘ah* have reached us.’

Returning to the ignorant thought expressed by the objectors, we see that it has been initially refuted in the third verse (29). It has been said that a prophet does not fancy anyone's wealth or property. He takes no compensation for his service or good counsel to people. His compensation is with Allah alone. Therefore, the rich and the poor are equal in his sight. Let the rich not be scared about their wealth for no one would start asking for it once they become believers.

Then, they were told: 'As for the condition you impose that I should remove the poor from my company in order that you could believe, then, let it be very clear that I cannot do that. They may be poor but they are close to the Highest of the high, the greatest honor one can have. Turning such people out is not a right thing to do.'

And: **مَلْفُورَتِهِمْ** (They are surely to meet their Lord) could also mean: If, supposedly, I were to turn them out, when they go to their Lord on the day of *Qiyāmah* and complain, what would I have to say? The subject continues in the fourth verse (30): If I were to turn them out, who would save me from Divine punishment? At the end, it was said: All this is nothing but your ignorance and heedlessness. To you being a man is counter to being a prophet, or you go to the other extreme and demand that poor people should be driven away from his company.

Reported in the fifth verse (31) there is an address that Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام gave before his people to announce some matters of principle after he had heard their objections. In this address it has been stressed that the mission of a prophet and messenger does not depend on things they think are necessary for it.

For instance, first it was said: **وَلَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ عِندِي خَزَائِنُ اللَّهِ** (And I do not say to you that with me are the treasures of Allah). This carries a refutation of their idea that someone coming from Allah as His messenger should have brought treasures with him giving it out to everyone freely. Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام put it out clearly that the mission of prophets has nothing to do with involving people into the mess of worldly enjoyments. What for would they need all those treasures?

It is also possible that the statement may be refuting the false thought nursed by some people that Allah has given all powers to prophets, even to Auliya'. Assuming this, it is surmised that they have the treasures of Allah's power in their hands and that they decide

whom to give and whom not to give. So, this declaration of Sayyidnā Nuh عليه السلام makes it clear that Allah Ta'ālā has not entrusted the total control of the treasures of His power not even with any prophet, not to say much about the Auliya' or men of Allah. However, when they pray or wish, Allah Ta'ālā does answer their prayers and fulfills their wishes with His infinite power.

Secondly, it was said: وَلَا أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبِ (nor do I have the knowledge of the unseen). Another false idea these people harbored was that a person who is a *rasūl* of Allah Ta'ālā should also be the one who knows what is unseen (*'ālim al-ghayb*). This sentence clarifies that the mission of a prophet and messenger needs no knowledge of the unseen, and why should it when the knowledge of the unseen is an exclusive attribute of Allah Ta'ālā which no prophet or angel can share with Him. However, Allah Ta'ālā does inform whomever He wills from out of His prophets about the secrets of the unseen as much as He wills. But, because of this, it is not correct to call them *'ālim al-ghayb* (possessor of the knowledge of the unseen) – because, it is not in their power to find out something in the domain of the unseen at their choice.

Thirdly, it was said: وَلَا أَقُولُ إِنِّي مَلَكٌ (nor do I say that I am an angel). Here we have a refutation of their idea that a *rasūl* should be some angel.

Fourthly, it was stated: In your sight these poor people may appear lowly and disgraceful. But, I cannot say as you say that Allah Ta'ālā will not bless them with what is good, because good relates to one's heart, not wealth, and only Allah knows the secrets of hearts and He knows whose heart is worthy of receiving good and whose heart is not.

Then, it was said: If I too were to start calling them lowly and disgraceful, I too would become unjust.

Verses 36 – 40

وَأَوْحَىٰ إِلَىٰ نُوحٍ أَنَّهُ لَنْ يُؤْمِنَ مِنْ قَوْمِكَ إِلَّا مَنْ قَدْ آمَنَ فَلَا تَبْتَئِسْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾ وَاصْنَعِ الْفُلَكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا وَوَحْيِنَا وَلَا تُخَاطِبْنِي فِي الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا ۚ إِنَّهُمْ مُّعْرِضُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾ وَيَصْنَعِ الْفُلَكَ ۚ وَكَلَّمَا مَرَّ عَلَيْهِ مَلَأُ مِنْ قَوْمِهِ سَخِرُوا مِنْهُ ۚ

قَالَ إِنَّ تَسْخَرُوا مِنَّا فَإِنَّا نَسْخَرُ مِنْكُمْ كَمَا تَسْخَرُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾
 فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ۖ مَنْ يَأْتِيهِ عَذَابٌ يُخْزِيهِ وَيَحِلُّ عَلَيْهِ
 عَذَابٌ مُّقِيمٌ ﴿٣٩﴾ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا وَفَارَ التَّنُورُ ۖ قُلْنَا
 احْمِلْ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجَيْنِ اثْنَيْنِ وَأَهْلَكَ إِلَّا مَنْ سَبَقَ عَلَيْهِ
 الْقَوْلُ وَمَنْ آمَنَ ۚ وَمَا آمَنَ مَعَهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

And it was revealed to Nūḥ that none of your people would ever believe except those who have already believed: "So, be not distressed by what they have been doing. [36] And make an ark under Our eyes and according to Our revelation. And do not speak to Me about those who crossed the limits – they are to be drowned." [37]

And he started making the Ark. And whenever the chieftains of his people passed by him, they mocked at him. He said, "If you mock at us, we mock at you like you mock at us: [38] So, you shall soon know to whom will come the punishment that will humiliate him and upon whom will befall a lasting punishment." [39]

At last when Our command came and the oven overflowed. We said, "Load in it a pair of two from every kind along with your family – except those against whom the Word has already been spoken – and those who have believed." And there were only a few who had believed with him. [40]

Commentary

Allah Ta'ālā had blessed Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام with long years of life extending up to nearly one thousand years. Along with it, he was given a special status in terms of his prophetic mission to invite people to Allah and make their condition better whereby he devoted these long years to keep asking them to believe in the true Faith and in Allah as One. He had to face the harshest of pains in this mission. His people would throw stones at him until he fell down and lost consciousness. But, as soon as he would regain it, he prayed to Allah for the forgiveness of his people for they did not know what they were doing. A generation was followed by the other, and the other by yet another, in a chain and he kept giving his call in the hope that they

might, at some stage, accept the truth.

When centuries passed over this exercise in patience, he complained about their deplorable condition before his Almighty Lord which has been mentioned in Sūrah Nūh: قُلْ يَرْدُهُمْ رَبِّيْ اِنْ دَعَوْتُ قَوْمِيْ لَيْلًا وَنَهَارًا، فَلَمْ يَرْدُهُمْ (My Lord, I did invite my people [to the truth] night and day. But, my invitation increased them in nothing but flight [in aversion] – 71:5,6) and, after all those long years of hardship, the prayer that this great servant of Allah made was: رَبِّ اَنْصُرْنِيْ بِمَا كَذَبُوْن (My Lord, help me because they have belied me – al-Mu'minūn, 23: 26,39).

When the reign of terror let loose by the people of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام became much too excessive, he was addressed by Allah Ta'ālā in the words appearing in the verses cited above. (al-Baghawī, Maḥzarī)

Firstly, he was told that, out of his people, those who were to believe had already believed. No one was to believe after that. Their hearts were sealed with their own obstinacy and contumacy. Therefore, he should not grieve about his people any more and feel free of any concern about their failure to believe.

Secondly, he was told that Allah was to send the punishment of flood against those people. Therefore, he should make an ark that could hold his family, as many believers as there were, and what they needed, so that they could embark it when the flood comes and be safe from it. Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام made the ark as he was ordered to. When the initial signs of the flood came before them – that water started overflowing from the earth – Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام was commanded to embark the ark along with his family and the few believers who had believed in him. They were also asked to load a pair each of animals that serve human needs, such as, cow, ox, goat, horse, mule etc. Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام put everyone on the ark as ordered.

At the end it was said that the believers in Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام who boarded the ark were only a few.

This was a gist of the subject as it appears in the cited verses. Now we can turn to the explanation of each verse and deal with issues and problems that emerge therefrom.

In the first verse (36), it was said that it was revealed to Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام that those who were to believe from among his people had already believed. In future, no one else will believe. Therefore, he

should not worry about how they deal with him because one feels the pinch of sorrow only when one expects something good to come from someone. Disappointment is not that bad. It has its own relief. He might as well be disappointed with them. As for the shock felt by Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام because of all sorts of pains inflicted by his people on him, arrangements had already been made as indicated the next verse (37) – ‘they are to be drowned.’ Under these conditions came that invocation of curse for his people on the lips of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام which has been mentioned in Sūrah Nūḥ:

رَبِّ لَا تَذَرْ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ ذِيَارًا ، إِنَّكَ إِنْ تَذَرَهُمْ يُضِلُّوا عِبَادَكَ وَلَا يَلِدُوا إِلَّا فَاجِرًا كَفَّارًا

“My Lord, do not leave upon the earth any inhabitant from among the disbelievers. Indeed, if You were to leave them, they will mislead Your servants and will not procreate anyone but the ones wicked and disbelieving (diehards)” – 71:26,27.

In answer to this prayer, the people of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام were drowned en masse.

Boat-Making: The Education of a Prophet

When Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام was commanded to make an ark, he knew no ark, nor its making. Therefore, in the next verse (37), he got his first lesson. To orient him to the reality of boat making, it was said: *وَاصْنِ الْفُلْكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا وَوَحْيِنَا* (And make an ark under Our eyes and according to Our revelation).

Ḥadīth reports say that Sayyidnā Jibra’īl al-Amin عليه السلام told Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام by means of revelation all about the making of boats. He had used wood from the saul tree (*shorea robusta*) to build this ark.

Some historical narratives give its measurement. It was three hundred yards long, fifty yards in width and thirty yard high, almost a three storied ship. Its ventilators, as customary, opened to the right and the left. Thus, this industry, the first prototype of the ship building industry, began at the hands of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام for the first time through Divine revelation. After that, the progress it made is current history.

All Essential Industries Originated through Revelation

It has been reported on the authority of some elders of early centu-

ries of Islām in at-Ṭibb an-Nabawī of Ḥafīẓ Shamsud-Dīn adh-Dhahabī that all industries essential for human beings owe their origin to the process of Divine revelation through some prophet. Later, improvements kept coming as needed during different times. The first revelation that came to Sayyidnā Adam عليه السلام mostly related to rehabilitation of the land and establishment of different industries. The invention of wheel carts for loading and hauling things is part of the chain of inventions.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the founder of the well-known Aligarh College, (now the Muslim University of Aligarh, India) used to say more than a hundred years ago that the world has seen inventions of all sorts in moving vehicles but its pivot continued to be the axle and the wheel. It is the common factor between a bullock-cart, a donkey-cart, rails and cars. Therefore, the greatest inventor of moving vehicles is the person who invented the wheel that is the life and soul of a lot of machines. As it was said, this invention unfolded itself at the hands of the first prophet, Sayyidnā Ādam, peace on him, through a Divine revelation.

From here we also learn that industries devoted to essential human needs are so important that the blessed prophets have been taught and trained in these through Divine revelation.

Soon after instructing Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام how he would make an ark, he was told that a flood would come and his people will be drowned and that, at the time, he was not to intercede out of compassion on their behalf.

In the third verse (38), mentioned there is the total lack of concern for their sad end shown by the people of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام during the period he was making the ark. When the chieftains of his people saw him busy with his project under a Divine command, they would ask him, 'what are you doing?' He said, 'a flood is to come, therefore, I am making an ark.' They would mock at him and say, 'we have no water to drink here and this wise man is planning to sail in a boat on this dry land.' In response, Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام told them, 'if you mock at us today, then remember the day is sure to come when we shall be laughing at you.' The sense is that conditions would change and events would unfold in a manner that they themselves would become the cause of their being mocked at. For, in reality, ridicule is contrary to

the spiritual station of prophets. It is simply not permissible for anyone, in fact, it is *ḥarām* (unlawful). Says the Holy Qur'an: لَا يَسْتَحِقُّونَ مِنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَى أَنْ يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ (O those who have believed, no people should mock at [other] people – may be, they are better than them – 49:11) Therefore, the mocking referred to here is a pragmatic response to their mockery. This is like saying, 'when you are seized by the punishment, we shall be telling you that this was the outcome of your mockery.' This is as it was said after that in the fourth verse (39): 'So, you shall soon know to whom will come the punishment that will humble him, and upon whom will befall the lasting punishment.' The first punishment refers to the punishment in the mortal world, and the 'lasting punishment' means the never-ending punishment of the Hereafter.

From the fifth verse (40) begins the description of the coming of the flood, related instructions and events as they unfolded. So, first it was said: حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا وَفَارَ التَّنُّورُ (At last, when Our command came and the oven overflowed).

The word: تنور (*tannūr*: oven) is used in more than one sense. The Earth's floor is called an oven. The oven that bakes bread is also a *tannūr*. A raised part of the land is also referred to as *tannūr*. Therefore, some of the Tafsīr authorities have said that, at this place, '*tannūr*' means the surface of the land in that water started overflowing from it. Some of them have said that it means the *tannūr* of Sayyidnā Ādam عليه السلام that was located at '*ainul- wardah*' in Syria – and water overflowed from it. Some others said that Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام own *tannūr* was located in Kūfah and that was what it means. Most commentators – Sayyidnā Ḥasan, Mujāhid, Sha'bī, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه and others – have gone by this view.

As for Sha'bī, he used to say on oath that this *tannūr* was located in a secluded quarter of the city of Kūfah, and that Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام had built his ark in the mosque of Kūfah. This *tannūr* was right by the entrance to this mosque. Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه says that Allah Ta'ālā had told Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام, 'when you see water overflowing from the oven in your home, know that the flood has come.' (Qurṭubī and Maḥḥarī)

Commentator al-Qurṭubī said: The sayings of commentators appear to be different as to the meaning of *tannūr*, but this, in reality, is not a difference. When water began to bulge out, it overflowed from the

bread baking oven, and from out of the surface of the land, and from the oven of 'Ainul-Wardah in Syria. The Holy Qur'an has said explicitly: فَفَتَحْنَا أَبْوَابَ السَّمَاءِ بِمَاءٍ مُنْهَمِرٍ وَفَجَّرْنَا الْأَرْضَ عُيُونًا: (Then We opened the gates of the heaven with rain pouring down and caused the earth to burst out with springs – al-Qamar, 54:11).

In his statement, Sha'bi has also said that this grand mosque of Kūfah has its own distinct status after al-Masjid al-Harām, al-Masjid an-Nabawī and al-Masjid al-Aqṣā.

Later in the verse, it was said: When the flood had started, Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام was commanded: اِحْمِلْ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجَيْنِ اثْنَيْنِ (Load in it a pair of two from every kind).

This tells us that all kinds of animals were not loaded in the ark of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام. Loaded there were animals born to a pair of male and female and which cannot survive in water. Therefore, all sea life stands excluded from here and so do land based life forms born without male-female conjunction. This leaves only domestic animals like the cow, ox, water buffalo, goat etc.

This removes the possible doubt as to how could the ark hold that many animals.

After that, Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام was asked to have his family members – other than the disbelieving ones – board the ark, as well as those who had believed in him, though they were only a few.

The exact number of those who sailed on the ark has not been determined in the Qur'an and Ḥadīth. It has been reported from Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه that their total number was eighty, which included three sons of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام – Sām, Hām, Yāfith – and the three of their wives. The fourth son had stayed with the disbelievers and was drowned with them.

Verses 41 – 44

وَقَالَ ارْكَبُوا فِيهَا بِسْمِ اللَّهِ مَجْرَاهَا وَمُرْسَاهَا إِنَّ رَبِّي لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٤١﴾ وَهِيَ تَجْرِي بِهِمْ فِي مَوْجٍ كَالْجِبَالِ وَ نَادَى نُوحٌ ابْنَهُ وَكَانَ فِي مَعْزِلٍ يَبْنَئِ ارْكَبْ مَعَنَا وَلَا تَكُنْ مَعَ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾ قَالَ سَاوِي إِلَى جَبَلٍ يَعْصِمُنِي مِنَ الْمَاءِ قَالَ

لَا عَاصِمَ الْيَوْمَ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ وَحَالٌ بَيْنَهُمَا الْمُوجُ
فَكَانَ مِنَ الْمَغْرِقِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾ وَقِيلَ يَا رِضْ اْبْلَعِي مَاءَكِ وَيَسْمَاءُ
اْقْلَعِي وَغِيْضَ الْمَاءِ وَقُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ وَاسْتَوَتْ عَلَى الْجُودِيِّ
وَقِيلَ بُعْدَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾

And he said, "Embark it. With the name of Allah it sails and anchors. Surely, my Lord is Most-Forgiving, Very-Merciful." [41]

And it was sailing with them amidst the waves like mountains. And Nūḥ called out to his son, who was at an isolated place, "O my child, come on board with us, and do not be in the company of the disbelievers." [42] He said, "I shall take shelter on a mountain which will save me from the water." He said, "There is no saver today from the command of Allah, except the one to whom He shows mercy." And the waves rose high between the two, and he was among the drowned. [43]

And it was said, "O earth, suck in your water, and O heaven, stop." And water subsided, and the matter was over. And it (the Ark) came to rest on the Jūdiyy, and it was said, "Curse be upon the wrongdoers." [44]

Commentary

Etiquette of boarding boats and other modes of conveyance

The first verse (41) teaches the etiquette of boarding boats and other modes of conveyance. One should board by saying: بِسْمِ اللَّهِ مَجْرَ مَا وَمُرْسَلَهَا (With the name of Allah it sails and anchors). The word: مَجْرَ (majrā pronounced according to the reading (*qirā'ah*) of Imām Ḥafṣ as 'majrāy' with *fatḥah* on the letter *mīm* and a major *Imālah* [inclination] on the letter *rā*) means to sail or to move, and مَرْسَى (mursā) means to stop or anchor. The sense is that the moving of this mode of transport owes itself to the power of Allah, and is with His name alone, as well as its stopping which is also subservient to nothing but His power.

Every conveyance moves and stops only with the power of Allah Ta'ālā

Even a little thought would show that no conveyance, a boat or any other mode of transport that moves on land (or flies in the air) is really

within one's own power, neither its creating and making, nor its moving and stopping. A shallow view of things leads man to assume that he is the one who has manufactured it and made it move. The reality lies elsewhere. It does not take much to realize that man has not created iron, wood, brass, aluminum etc. which serve as raw material that go into the making of these modes of conveyance. And it is also clear that it does not lie in his control to create on his own a gram of iron or a foot of wood. Then, who gave them the intelligence to design and produce all sorts of mechanical parts and instruments? How did he do that? Did he create his own intelligence? Had it been within the power of man, no one in this wide world would have remained dumb. Everyone would have been a Plato and Aristotle in his field. So, man puts together wood and iron and mechanical support from all sides, makes the body and frame for the conveyance. Now he needs to haul tons of weight easily and quickly on the land or in the air. He needs power to do that. It may come through petrol, gas or hydro-electricity. Has man created any of these? Did he create the petrol or gas, or water, or oxygen, or hydrogen?

If we were to look at things impartially, we will realize that even in this age of great scientific advancement, the helplessness of man is still visible and it is true that the moving and stopping of every conveyance rests within the ultimate control of the creator of this universe.

The process of inventing things and making them work makes inventors self-centered. They start living in a hall of mirrors. They congratulate themselves to the limit that they lose touch with the reality of things on a canvass larger than what they invent. Allah Ta'ālā tells them through his prophets that there is more to their making that they fail to see: بِسْمِ اللَّهِ مَجْرَعًا وَمَرْسًا (With the name of Allah it sails and anchors). This is the reality. A brief statement, but very comprehensive. In fact, it is a key to a door. Once he enters it, he lives in this mortal world but turns into a citizen of the spiritual universe – seeing the beauty of the Lord everywhere in it.

From here unfolds the difference between the world of a believer and the world of a disbeliever. Both ride. But, when a believer steps in there, the conveyance does not simply shorten his travel distances on the land, it introduces him to the one higher, more sublime.

As stated in the second (42) and third (43) verse, when the whole family of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام had boarded the ark, a son whose name has been reported as Kinʿān (Canaan) was left out. Out of his paternal compassion, Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام called out to him asking him to come on board and warning him that he should not stay in the company of disbelievers otherwise he would be drowned with them. This young man was already in league with those disbelieving enemies, in fact, was himself a disbeliever. But, in all likelihood, Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام did not know that he was a disbeliever. And even if he did know that, the good counsel he gave to his son to board the boat and leave the company of the disbelievers was in the spirit of asking him to repent from disbelief and enter the fold of faith. But, the unfortunate son still took the flood to be something that will pass away and told him not to worry about him for he would be safe from the flood by climbing a mountain. Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام warned him again that nothing was going to save anyone, not even a mountain, from the punishment of Allah on that day and that there was no way one could remain safe from it unless Allah Himself were to show mercy to him. This father-son dialogue was on from a distance when rose a wave of the flood and took him down and away. Historical reports say that the level of the Flood was fifteen yards above the highest mountain peak and according to some other reports, it was forty yards high.

In the fourth verse (44), the recession of the flood and the return of things to normal conditions has been described in a particular manner. Addressing the earth, Allah Taʿālā commanded: يَارُضُ ابْلَعِي مَائِكَ (O earth, suck in your water). The sense was that the amount of water which had bulged out from the earth was to be taken back in by the earth. The sky was commanded to stop raining. The water from rains that had already accumulated on the earth, nature channeled it into rivers and streams for human beings to benefit by it. (Tafsīr Qurtubī, Mazḥarī)

In this verse, Allah Taʿālā has given His commands by addressing the heaven and the earth, although these are no sensate entities, at least outwardly. Therefore, some commentators have taken it in a figurative sense. But, the fact of the matter is that, in terms of our perception, things in the world which appear non-conscious, insensate, and lifeless are, in all reality, live and conscious. Yes, their consciousness and perception are not of a level as given to humankind and oth-

ers, therefore, by declaring them to be inanimate, they were not obligated with the precepts and injunctions of the Sharī'ah. Many verses of the Holy Qur'ān confirm it, such as: وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يَسْبُحُ بِحَمْدِهِ (and there is no such thing which does not glorify Him with praises – 17:44). And it is obvious that the glorification of Allah Ta'ālā depends on knowing Him, and knowing, on reason and consciousness. This tells us that everything has reason and consciousness according to its respective capacity. From it, it recognizes its creator and whatever it has been assigned to do by Him. Everything knows it fully well and keeps doing it staunchly as due. The verse of the Qur'ān: أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى (gave each thing its form then guided [it] – Tāhā, 20:50) means exactly this. Therefore, in this verse, if the address to the heaven and the earth is taken in the real sense, it does not matter. Sage Rūmī said:

خاک و باد و آب و آتش بنده اند بامن و تو مرده باحق زنده اند

Dust, air, water and fire are all 'servants'

For you and me, dead, but with Him, live.

At the end of the fourth verse (44), it was said that the heaven and the earth obeyed the orders and the matter of the flood was all over. The Ark of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام came to rest on the Mount Jūdiyy and it was declared that the unjust people have been cast far 'away from the mercy of Allah' – (which is what curse is).

Mount Jūdiyy still stands there by that name. Geographically, it is located on the border of Armenia near Ibn 'Umar Island north of Mou-sil in 'Iraq, the real home of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام. This is a mountain range, part of which is called Jūdiyy. Another part of it is known as Ararāt. In the present Torah, the place where the Ark came to rest has been identified as Mount Ararāt. As obvious, there is not much of a contradiction in these two reports. But, well-known old historical accounts also say that the ark of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام had come to rest on Mount Jūdiyy.

These accounts also mention that pieces of this ark are still there at many places in 'Iraq. These are kept and used as a relic.

According to Tafsīr at-Ṭabarī and al-Baghawī, Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام had embarked the Ark on the tenth of the month of Rajab. For six months, this ark sailed on the waters of the flood. When it reached the spot where Baytullah was, it made seven circuits. Allah Ta'ālā had

raised His House higher from being submerged. Then, on the tenth of Muḥarram, the day of ‘Āshūrā’, the flood subsided and the ark came to rest at the Mount of Jūdiyy. Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام observed a thanksgiving fast on that day and asked everyone on the ark to do the same. Some reports say that even animals that had shared the ark fasted on that day. (Mazharī and Qurṭubī)

The importance of the day of ‘Āshūrā’, that is, the tenth of Muḥarram, has been recognized in all religious codes of the blessed prophets. In early Islām – before the fasts of Ramaḍān became obligatory – fasting on the day of ‘Āshūrā’ was *farḍ*. It is no more *farḍ* after the revelation of the obligatory status of fasting in Ramaḍān, but it continues to be a practice of prophets, and a source of reward forever.

Verses 45 – 49

وَنَادَى نُوحٌ رَبَّهُ فَقَالَ رَبِّ إِنَّ ابْنِي مِنْ أَهْلِي وَإِنَّ وَعْدَكَ الْحَقُّ
وَأَنْتَ أَحْكَمُ الْحَكَمِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾ قَالَ يُنُوحُ إِنَّهُ لَيْسَ مِنْ أَهْلِكَ
إِنَّهُ عَمَلٌ غَيْرُ صَالِحٍ فَلَا تَسْأَلْنِ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنِّي
أَعِظُكَ أَنْ تَكُونَ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾ قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ أَنْ
أَسْأَلَكَ مَا لَيْسَ لِي بِهِ عِلْمٌ وَإِلَّا تَغْفِرْ لِي وَتَرْحَمْنِي أَكُنْ مِنَ
الْخَاسِرِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾ قِيلَ يُنُوحُ اهْبِط بِسَلَامٍ مِنَّا وَبَرَكَاتٍ عَلَيْكَ
وَعَلَى أُمَمٍ مِمَّنْ مَعَكَ وَأَمَّا سَمْتَعُهُمْ ثُمَّ يَمْسُرُهُم مِّنَّا عَذَابٌ
أَلِيمٌ ﴿٤٨﴾ تِلْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهَا إِلَيْكَ مَا كُنْتَ
تَعْلَمُهَا أَنْتَ وَلَا قَوْمُكَ مِنْ قَبْلِ هَذَا فَاصْبِرْ إِنَّ الْعَاقِبَةَ
لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

And Nūḥ called unto his Lord and said, “My Lord, my son is a part of my family, and surely, Your promise is true, and You are the greatest of all judges.” [45] He said, “O Nūḥ, surely, he is not a part of your family. Indeed, he is (a man of) bad deeds. So do not ask Me something of which you have no knowledge. I counsel you not to be among the ignorant. [46]

He said, “My Lord, I seek refuge with You against that I

ask You something of which I have no knowledge. And if You do not forgive me and do not show mercy to me, I shall be among the losers.” [47]

It was said, “O Nūḥ, disembark in peace from Us and with blessings upon you and upon the peoples (springing) from those with you. And there are peoples whom We shall give some enjoyment, then a painful punishment from Us will visit them.”[48]

These are some reports from the unseen (events) which We reveal to you. You did not know them before this, neither you nor your people. So, be patient. Surely, the end is in favor of the God-fearing. [49]

Commentary

The remaining account of the flood associated with the name of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام, along with instructions related to it, appears in the five verses cited above.

When Can‘aan, the son of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام, did not board the ark despite the counsel and call of his esteemed father who was still concerned emotionally as he saw his son surrounded by the waves of the flood. His filial love knocked at another door. He turned to his Lord and prayed to Him on the basis of His promise that He would save his family from the flood, and that His promise was true. But, conditions were alarming and his son who was part of his family was going to be swallowed by the flood. The only court of appeal he could now go to was the court of the most just of judges for everything was in His power and control and that He could still save him from the flood.

In the second verse (46), came a stern response from Allah Ta‘ālā whereby Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام was told that this son was no more a part of his family because he was not good and right in what he did. Therefore, it was not proper for him to approach Him with some request while being unaware of the true state of affairs. Then came the mollifying remark that the good counsel was being given to him so that he too does not become one of the ignorant.

Two things come out from what was said by Allah Ta‘ālā:

1. Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام did not know about the disbelief of his son clearly and fully. He thought he was a hypocrite, so he still took him to

be a believer. Therefore, identifying him as a part of his family, he went ahead and prayed that he be saved from the flood. Otherwise, had he known the true state of affairs about him, he would have not made such a prayer. The reason is that he was already instructed in clear terms that he should not, once the flood comes, speak about those who had crossed the limit as it appears in verse 37 earlier **وَلَا تُخَاطِبْنِي فِي الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا إِنَّهُمْ مُخْرَجُونَ**. After this clear and explicit injunction, it was impossible for a prophet of God that he would venture to do something against it. The only possible explanation for this could be that, as suggested by the author of Bayān al-Qur'ān, the desired objective of this prayer is that his son becomes a believer and not that he be saved from the flood under his present condition. But, Allah Ta'ālā has not taken Sayyidnā Nūḥ's **عليه السلام** lack of knowledge about the disbelief of his son and the prayer for his deliverance based on it as sound excuses. Therefore, he was questioned as to why he would make such a prayer. This is a slip at the highest level of the station of a prophet which Sayyidnā Nūḥ **عليه السلام** would himself refer to on the day of Resurrection when the whole creation will request him to intercede with the Lord on their behalf. He would excuse himself by saying what had happened to him, therefore, he would not dare any intercession.

Prayer for the disbelieving and the unjust is not permissible

A religious rule of conduct that we learn about here is that one should first find out whether or not the objective for which he is making a prayer is permissible and *ḥalāl* (lawful). It is prohibited to make *Du'ā* (prayer) under doubtful circumstances. Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī with reference to al-Baydāwī reports that since this verse tells us about the prohibition of *Du'ā* under doubtful circumstances, it is automatically inferred from it that it will be all the more prohibited to pray for anything known to be impermissible and unlawful.

This rule also helps us realize the absence of discretion among modern day Shaykhs (spiritual masters) who have become used to raising their hands of prayer for anyone who comes in asking for some prayer to be made for him. Most of the time, they know that this person is not on the right, or is unjust, in the case for which he is asking the Shaykh to pray. Or, the person is asking the Shaykh to pray for a purpose that is not lawful for him, may be this person is looking for a particular job or office through which he will become involved in earn-

ing unlawfully, or succeed in it by usurping someone's right.

When attending circumstances are known, such prayers are unlawful and impermissible after all. Even if the circumstances are doubtful, taking the initiative to make Du'a, without first getting to know the circumstances as they are and the lawfulness of the matter in question, is also not appropriate.

Brotherly relations between believers and disbelievers

2. The second religious ruling that emerges from here is that a believer and a disbeliever may be blood relatives to each other, but when it comes to religious and collective matters, this kinship will have no effect. A person may be high born, he may come from the progeny of men of high spiritual status, so much so that one may even have the honor of being among the progeny of our most noble Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. But, this high lineage and this prophetic connection will also not be taken into consideration as a factor in religious matters, if the person is not a believer. In religion, everything functionally depends on faith, goodness and the fear of Allah. One who is good in deeds and fears Allah, he is ours. If not like that, he is an alien.

Had concessions based on kinship been given even in religious matters, brothers would have not crossed swords against each other in the battlefields of Badr and Uhud. It is common knowledge among Muslims that the battles of Badr, Uhud and al-Ahẓāb were fought among individuals coming from the same families. This clearly demonstrates that Islamic nationality or brotherhood does not hinge on lineal bond or geographical or linguistic unity. Instead, it revolves round faith and deed. All believers, residents of any country, members of any family and speakers of any language, are a single nation, a single brotherhood. The Qur'ānic verse: إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ (The believers are but brothers – 40:10) means just this. Then, those who are deprived of faith and good deeds, they are not members of the Islamic brotherhood. The Holy Qur'an has made this reality all the more clear through the words spoken by Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام: إِنَّا بَرَاءُكُمْ وَإِنَّمَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ (Indeed, we have nothing to do with you and with whatever you worship other than Allah – al-Mumtahinah, 60:4).

This humble writer has restricted the above rule to the 'religious matters' only for the reason that, in worldly matters, demonstrating

good social behavior, moral grace, favor and generosity is something different. It is quite permissible to deal even with someone not good with these graces, in fact, it is recommended, and is an act worthy of *thawāb* (reward). Countless instances where the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and his noble Companions have treated non-Muslims with compassion, favor and good grace are sufficient to prove this.

In our time, the edifice of nationalities is raised on the foundations of homeland, language or color whereby Muslims are segregated into one or the other 'nation' under false banners. This is contrary to the Qur'an, and Sunnah, and amounts to rising in rebellion against the principles of political and social management enunciated by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم.

Mentioned in the third verse (47) is the apology tendered by Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام. In gist, it is a return to Allah in submission and entreaty, a prayer for the protection of Allah, His forgiveness for past omissions, and a request for His mercy.

From here we learn that, should one commit a mistake, let him not rely on his personal resolve to stay safe from it in the future. He should, rather, seek the protection of Allah Ta'ālā and pray to Him that He is the One who can keep him safe from errors and sins.

In the fourth verse (48), described there is the end of the flood. When the flood subsided, the ark of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام came to rest on Mount Judiyy, the earth sucked its water back, standing water from the heaven got preserved in the form of rivers and streams making the land habitable. Then, Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام was asked to disembark, go down the mountain, for there was nothing to worry about. Blessings of Allah will be with him keeping him secure from any calamities and hardships and that he will prosper in terms of peace, wealth and children.

According to this statement, the entire post-flood human population of the world is the progeny of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام. At another place, the Qur'an has said: *وَجَعَلْنَا ذُرِّيَّتَهُ هُمُ الْبَاقِينَ* (and those remaining We made his descendants – 37:77). Therefore, historians refer to Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام as the second Ādam.

Then, the promise of peace and blessing made to Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام is not limited to his person, instead, it was said: *وَعَلَىٰ أُمَمٍ مِّنْ مَّعَكَ* (and

upon the peoples [springing] from those with you). Those who boarded the ark with Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام have been identified with the word: امم (*umam*) which is the plural form of امة (*ummah*: community). It releases the sense that those on board the ark consisted of different nationalities and communities, although we already know that those who had embarked the ark were mostly people from the family of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام in addition to a few other believers as well. So, they were identified as different communities and nationalities in the sense that different communities and nationalities will spring forth from their future generations. This tells us that the whole human race to be born up to the day of Qiyāmah is included under the sense of the words: أُمَمٌ مِّنْ تَحْتِ مَعَكَ (peoples [springing] from those with you).

This was the reason why it became necessary to elaborate the subject of peace and blessing as the coming generation would include believers and disbelievers both. As for peace and blessing for believers, it is correct in its general sense for they would have peace and blessing in the mortal world as well as in the Hereafter. But, the disbelievers from this generation would have been consigned to the everlasting punishment of Hell. How would it be correct to say that they would be recipients of peace and blessing? Therefore, at the end of the verse, it was said: وَأَمَّا سَمِعْتُمُوهُمْ ثُمَّ مَنَعْنَاهُمْ مِّنْ جَنَّتِهِمْ وَمِنَّا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ (And there are peoples whom We shall give some enjoyment, then a painful punishment from Us will visit them). It means that the peace and blessing they will enjoy in the mortal world is like a feast thrown open to all, friends and foes alike. Also participating in it will be those who take to disbelief from among the progeny of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام, but the salvation and prosperity of the Hereafter shall be reserved for believers only. The disbeliever will be given the return for his good deeds within the mortal world and there will be nothing left for him to receive in the Hereafter where he will find nothing but punishment waiting for him.

When the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم came to know of this detailed information about Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام and the Flood through revelation, he related it to his people – this event, then became a standing witness to the veracity of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم himself as a genuine prophet. To alert him to this situation, it was said in the fifth verse (49): ‘As for Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام and the flood that came during his time, these were pieces of information that lay in the domain of the

unseen. He had no knowledge of it beforehand, nor his people, the Arabs, knew about it. It was he who told them about it. What was the explanation for it? How could it happen? There was no other explanation but that Allah had Himself told him about it through revelation, because, had his people been educated and conversant with world history, it could be surmised that he had related these events after having heard them from those learned people. But, when the whole lot of his people was unaware of these events and their prophet too had never gone to another country to get his education there, then, the only inlet of this information stands determined conclusively. It was Wahy, the divine revelation, which is a clear proof that the prophet is a true messenger of Allah.

To console the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, it was said at the end of the verse that there were so many open proofs to the fact that he was a prophet and messenger of Allah. If there were some unfortunate human beings that see the sun yet insist that they do not, even challenge him and confront him, then, he should look at the role model of his predecessor, Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام, peace on him. He spent one thousand years of his long life suffering from pain inflicted by his people. He remained patient. Let him stay as patient as he was – because, it stands determined that success will ultimately kiss the hands of those patient and God-fearing.

Verses 50 – 68

وَالِى عَادِ أَخَاهُمْ هُودًا ۖ قَالَ يَقَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِّنْ إِلَهِ
غَيْرِهِ ۖ إِنِّي أَنُتِمِ إِلَّا مُفْتَرُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾ يَقَوْمِ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ
أَجْرًا ۖ إِنِّي أَخْبِرُكُمْ إِلَّا عَلَى الَّذِى فَطَرَنِي ۖ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٥١﴾
وَيَقَوْمِ اسْتَغْفِرُكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ ثُمَّ تَوْبُوا إِلَيْهِ يُرْسِلِ السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْكُمْ
مِدْرَارًا وَيَزِدْكُمْ قُوَّةً إِلَى قُوَّتِكُمْ وَلَا تَتَوَلَّوْا مُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾
قَالُوا يَهُودُ مَا جِئْتَنَا بِبَيِّنَةٍ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِتَارِكِي آلِهَتِنَا عَنْ
قَوْلِكَ وَمَا نَحْنُ لَكَ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾ إِن نَّقُولُ إِلَّا اعْتَرَاكَ
بَعْضُ آلِهَتِنَا بِسُوءٍ ۖ قَالَ إِنِّي أُشْهِدُ اللَّهَ وَاشْهَدُوا أَنِّي بَرِيءٌ

تَمَا تُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾ مِنْ دُونِهِ فَاكِيدُونِي جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ لَا تُنْظِرُونَ
 ﴿٥٥﴾ إِنِّي تَوَكَّلْتُ عَلَى اللَّهِ رَبِّي وَرَبِّكُمْ مَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ
 اخْذُهَا صَیْثُهَا إِنَّ رَبِّي عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٥٦﴾ فَإِنْ
 تَوَلَّوْا فَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ مَا أُرْسِلْتُ بِهِ إِلَيْكُمْ وَيَسْتَخْلِفُ رَبِّي
 قَوْمًا غَيْرَكُمْ وَلَا تَضُرُّوهُ شَيْئًا إِنَّ رَبِّي عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ
 حَفِیْظٌ ﴿٥٧﴾ وَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا نَحْنُ نَحْنُ هَؤُلَاءِ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ
 بِرَحْمَةٍ مِّنَّا وَنَجَّيْنَاهُمْ مِّنْ عَذَابٍ غَلِيظٍ ﴿٥٨﴾ وَتِلْكَ عَادَتْ
 حَاجِدُوا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَعَصَوْا رُسُلَهُ وَاتَّبَعُوا أَمْرَ كُلِّ جَبَّارٍ
 عَنِيدٍ ﴿٥٩﴾ وَاتَّبَعُوا فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا لَعْنَةً وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ إِلَّا إِنْ
 عَادَا كَفَرُوا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَّا بَعْدًا لِّعَادِ قَوْمِ هُودٍ ﴿٦٠﴾ وَإِلَى ثَمُودَ
 أَخَاهُمْ صَالِحًا قَالَ يَاقَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ هُوَ
 أَنشَأَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ وَاسْتَعْمَرَكُمْ فِيهَا فَاسْتَغْفِرُوهُ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا
 إِلَيْهِ إِنَّ رَبِّي قَرِيبٌ مُّجِيبٌ ﴿٦١﴾ قَالُوا يَٰصَالِحُ قَدْ كُنْتَ فِينَا
 مَرْجُوًّا قَبْلَ هَذَا أَتَنْهَانَا أَنْ نَعْبُدَ مَا يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُنَا وَإِنَّا لَفِي
 شَكٍّ مِّمَّا تَدْعُونَا إِلَيْهِ مُرِيبٍ ﴿٦٢﴾ قَالَ يَقَوْمِ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُ
 عَلَى بَيِّنَةٍ مِّنْ رَبِّي وَآتَانِي مِنْهُ رَحْمَةً فَمَنْ يَنْصُرُنِي مِنَ اللَّهِ
 إِنْ عَصَيْتُهُ فَمَا تَزِيدُونَنِي غَيْرَ تَخْسِيرٍ ﴿٦٣﴾ وَيَقَوْمِ هَذِهِ
 نَاقَةُ اللَّهِ لَكُمْ آيَةٌ فَذَرُوهَا تَأْكُلْ فِي أَرْضِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَمَسُّوهَا
 بِسُوءٍ فَيَأْخُذْكُمْ عَذَابٌ قَرِيبٌ ﴿٦٤﴾ فَعَقَرُوهَا فَقَالَ لَمَتَّعُوا
 فِي دَارِكُمْ ثَلَاثَةَ أَيَّامٍ ۖ ذَٰلِكَ وَعْدٌ غَيْرُ مَكْذُوبٍ ﴿٦٥﴾ فَلَمَّا
 جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا نَحْنُ صَالِحًا وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِّنَّا وَمِنْ
 خِزْيِ يَوْمِئِذٍ ۖ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ الْقَوِيُّ الْعَزِيزُ ﴿٦٦﴾ وَأَخَذَ الَّذِينَ

ظَلَمُوا الصَّيْحَةَ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دِيَارِهِمْ جُثِمِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾ كَانُوا لَمْ
يَعْنُوا فِيهَا إِلَّا أَنْ تَمُودَ أَكْفَرُوا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَّا بُعْدًا لِمُودَ
﴿٦٨﴾

And to 'Ād (We sent) their brother Hūd. He said, "O my people, worship Allah. You have no god other than Him. You are nothing but fabricators. [50] O my people, I ask you no reward for it. My reward is only on the One who created me. Have you, then, no sense? [51] And O my people, seek forgiveness from your Lord, then turn to Him in repentance, so that He may release the heavens pouring upon you and may increase you in strength beside your strength, and do not turn away like sinners." [52]

They said, "O Hūd, you did not bring to us any proof, and we are not to leave our gods on your statement, and we are not to believe in you. [53] We do not say except that some of our gods have subjected you to some evil." He said, "I make Allah my witness, and you be witness that I have nothing to do with what you take as gods besides Him. [54] So, try your plans against me, all of you together, then give me no respite. [55] I place my trust in Allah, my Lord and your Lord. There is no creature but He takes it by the forelock. Surely, my Lord is on a straight path. [56] Now, if you turn away, I have already conveyed to you what I was sent to you with. And my Lord will replace you with some other people, and you cannot do Him any harm. Surely, my Lord is guardian over every thing." [57]

And when came Our command, We saved Hūd and those who believed along with him, out of mercy from Us, and We did save them from a heavy punishment. [58]

That was the tribe of 'Ād who rejected the signs of their Lord, disobeyed their Messengers and followed the dictates of every obstinate tyrant! [59] And a curse was made to pursue them in this world and on the Day of Doom. Lo! The people of 'Ād disbelieved their Lord. Lo! Curse be upon 'Ād, the people of Hūd. [60]

And to (the people of) Thamūd (We sent) their brother,

Ṣāliḥ. He said, "O my people, worship Allah. You have no god other than Him. He has created you from earth and made you settle therein. So, seek His forgiveness, then turn to Him in repentance. Surely, my Lord is near, responding." [61]

They said, "O Ṣāliḥ, we had hopes in you before this. Do you ask us not to worship what our fathers worshipped? And we are certainly in confounding doubt about what you are calling us to." [62]

He said, "O my people, tell me: When I am on a clear path, and He has bestowed mercy upon me from Himself, who will then come to my help against Allah, if I disobey Him? So, you add on to me nothing but a loss.

[63] And O my people, this is the she-camel of Allah, a sign for you. So, leave her free to eat in the land of Allah and do not even touch her with evil (intention), lest a near punishment should seize you." [64]

Then they slaughtered her. So, he said, "Enjoy yourselves in your homes for three days (only). That is a promise, not going to be false." [65]

So, when came Our command, We saved Ṣāliḥ and those who believed along with Him, out of mercy from Us, and (We saved them) from the disgrace of that day. Surely, your Lord is the Powerful, the All Mighty. [66]

And those who transgressed were caught by the Cry, and they were found dead in their homes, fallen on their knees, [67] as though they had never lived there. Lo! The people of Thamūd disbelieved their Lord. Lo! Curse be upon the people of Thamūd. [68]

Commentary

Mentioned in the first eleven verses (50-60) from the ones cited above are the events of the revered prophet of Allah, Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام by whose name this Sūrah is identified. Appearing in this Sūrah, there are events related to seven blessed prophets and their peoples from Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام to Sayyidnā Mūsā described in the unique style of the Holy Qur'ān. They have such flashes of lesson and advice that no one with a responsive and discerning heart can remain unaffected by them. Apart from their instructive aspects, they contain many principals and subsidiaries of faith and good deed as well as

guidance one can make use of in comparable situations.

As for stories and events taken up here, they relate to seven prophets, but the Sūrah has been identified with the name of Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام, which shows that the story of Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام has a particular significance in it.

Allah Ta'ālā had sent Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام as a prophet to the people of 'Ād. They were known for their physical build, strength and bravery. Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام was also one of them – as indicated in: اخاهم هودا (their brother, Hūd – 50). How regrettable that a people so strong and brave had lost their reason to the extent that they had taken to worshipping gods they had carved out of stones with their own hands.

Three basic principles of the call of faith Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام presented before his people have been mentioned in the first three verses (50-52). One: Belief in Tauḥīd (Oneness of Allah) and that taking someone or something else worthy of worship other than Allah is nothing but a lie and fabrication. Two: He was a Messenger of Allah. He had come with the call of Tauḥīd for them. This was the mission of his life. He was working hard against heavy odds to convey the message to them. Why would he do that? If they thought about it, they would see that he was not asking them to pay for his services, nor did he receive any material benefits from them. If he did not honestly believe it to be the will and command of Allah, and right and true, why would he go to all that trouble of inviting them to believe and live a better life?

Payment for *Da'wah* work

The Holy Qur'ān reports almost all prophets saying that they do not ask for any payment against the duty of Da'wah they do. This shows that, in case payment is accepted (as pre-arranged or as implied by custom) against Da'wah and Tablīgh, the call remains ineffective. Experience bears it out that those who take wages for their religious sermons, addresses and good counsels leave the hearts of their audience unchanged at the end of the exercise.

Three: Forgiveness and Repentance: He exhorted them to seek forgiveness from Allah Ta'ālā for their disbelief and for sins they had committed in their past life. Then, for future, let them be ashamed of what they had done, repent and promise to themselves making a firm

resolve and commitment that they would never go even near them. If they sincerely went through this process of seeking forgiveness from Allah and showing repentance before Him, the result will be that they shall, no doubt, be blessed with everlasting prosperity in the Hereafter, but in the mortal world too, they will themselves notice its many benefits coming to them. Firstly, the act of Istighfār and Taubah will remove the distress of famine from them. Heavy rains will come when due making their provisions sumptuous. Secondly, it would increase their strength and power.

The word: *قوة* (*quwwah*) has been used here in a general sense which includes physical strength and power as well as the strength that comes from increases in wealth and children.

This tells that Taubah and Istighfār have a special property of their own – that their practitioner is blessed with extended means of sustenance and satisfying increase in wealth and children, even in this mortal world.

Captives of their ignorant ways, the people of Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام brushed his call aside by saying, in effect, ‘a miracle would have been something, which you did not show to us. You are simply saying what you have to say. Now, just because what you are saying, we are not going to leave our gods we worship and, in you, we are not going to believe. In fact, we believe that you have lost your mind as a result of maligning our gods, otherwise you would not be saying all that.’

Demonstrating his prophetic courage, Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام said in response, ‘If you would not listen to me, then, hear this – I make Allah my witness and you too bear witness that I am disgusted with all your gods other than Allah. Now, do, you and your gods, whatever you all can do against me and do not even give me the least respite.’

And he said, ‘this I am telling you seriously for I have placed my trust in Allah who is my Lord and your Lord as well. He holds every creature that walks on the earth by the forelock. There is no one around who can dare cause harm or loss to anyone even to the measure of a tiny particle without His will and permission. Surely, my Lord is on the straight path, that is, one who takes the straight path finds Him and is helped by Him.’

Here was one man against a whole people making a claim so

strong and loud and putting them to shame and no one from a people so strong and brave dared budge before him! This was a standing miracle of Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام – which also provides an answer to their complaint that he did not show them a miracle. And it also provides yet another answer to their audacious comment that their gods had made him mentally deranged for, had their gods been exercising this kind of power, they would have never left him alive after what he had said against them.

After that, he said, ‘If you continue to be so insanely opposed to truth, then, you must understand that I have already conveyed to you the message with which I have been sent. Now, its logical outcome could be no other but that the wrath and punishment of Allah falls on you and you are destroyed to the last man and my Lord brings another people to settle on this land. As for what you are doing against this matter of truth, you are simply hurting yourself, not Allah. Surely, my Lord oversees everything and He is aware of all your deeds and thoughts.’

They were the kind of people who would not listen to anything. They chose to stick to their contumacy. Then, the punishment of Allah descended upon them in the form of a stormy wind that uprooted their homes and trees. Living entities, human and animal, would be blown up high into the air and ricochet back on to the ground faces down. Human cries could be heard coming from the sky – until this whole set of people, unique in their size and strength, were annihilated to the last man.

When came the command to send Divine punishment on these people, Allah Ta‘ālā, in accordance with His customary practice, saved His prophet and his companions from this severe punishment as they were ordered to leave that area before the punishment came.

After having mentioned the event relating to the people of ‘Ād and the punishment that came upon them, an exhortation was necessary so that others could learn their lesson from it. So, it was said: That was the tribe of ‘Ād! They rejected the signs of their Lord, disobeyed their Messengers yet kept following the dictates of those who were tyrannical and obstinate.

The outcome was that curse, that is, the state of being away from

the mercy of Allah, kept pursuing them in the mortal world and will keep pursuing them similarly on the day of Qiyāmah as well.

From this event, we learn that the people of 'Ād were overtaken by a stormy wind. But, it appears in Sūrah al-Mu'minūn (23:41) that they were destroyed by a harsh sound (*aṣ-ṣaiḥah*: The Cry, The Shriek). It is possible that both kinds of punishments had visited the people of Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام.

The event relating to the people of 'Ād and Sayyidnā Hūd عليه السلام ends here.

After that, the next eight verses (61-68) carry the story of Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام, peace be upon him. He was sent to the people of Thāmūd, another branch of the tribe of 'Ād. He too invited his people to believe in Tauḥīd, the Oneness of Allah. As customary, his people belied him and insisted that he must first make a she-camel of a specified description come out from the rock of the mountain in front of them in order to have them believe that he was a true prophet of Allah.

Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام warned them: If Allah Ta'ālā shows you your custom-ordered miracles, and you still fail to believe, then, according to the customary practice of Allah, the punishment will come and destroy all of you. But, they remained obstinate and Allah Ta'ālā, in His perfect power, made the miracle they demanded manifest before them. The rock of the mountain in front of them split asunder. Out from it came the she-camel bearing the features specified by them. Allah Ta'ālā ordered them not to harm that she-camel in any manner, otherwise the punishment will come upon them. But, they disobeyed this order as well, and killed the she-camel. Consequently, they were seized by Allah Ta'ālā, Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام and his companions were saved from the punishment, and the rest of those people were destroyed by a Sound which was severe and terrifying.

As part of this event, the people of Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام have been reported to have said to him: قَدْ كُنْتَ فِينَا مَرْجُوًّا قَبْلَ هَذَا (O Ṣāliḥ, we had hopes in you before this - 62). It means that, before he claimed to be a prophet and started telling them to shun idol-worship, they had great hopes in him. They thought he would rise to be a great reformer and leader of their people. The reason is that Allah Ta'ālā nurtures and grooms his prophets from their childhood in a way that they become

models of good morals and habits. Whoever looks at them, loves and respects them. This is what happened in the case of the Last Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. Before he declared that he has been sent as a prophet, the whole Arabia called him *al-amīn* (the trustworthy one) and took him to be true and righteous. It was only when he announced his prophet-hood and prohibited idol-worship that everyone turned hostile to him.

In verse 65, it was said: *تَتَعَمَّرُوا فِي دَارِكُمْ ثَلَاثَةَ أَيَّامٍ*: "Enjoy yourselves in your homes for three days [only]." That is, when these people killed the she-camel associated with the miracle in flagrant contravention of the Divine command, then, something serious happened. As warned earlier, 'lest a near punishment should seize you - 64', the punishment did come upon them in a manner that they were given a respite of three days and told that they all will be destroyed on the fourth day.

According to Tafsīr al-Qurtubī, these three days were Thursday, Friday and Saturday. On Sunday, the punishment descended upon them: *وَإِذَا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا الصَّيْحَةُ* (And those who transgressed were caught by the Cry - 67). This awesome Cry was that of the archangel, Sayyidnā Jibra'īl عليه السلام which was far more terrorizing than the combined thunderbolts of worldly lightening could ever be, something human senses could not take. All hearts were rent apart by the horrific sound resulting in the mass destruction of those people.

From this verse we learn that the people of Sayyidnā Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام were destroyed by a severe Sound, but what Sūrah al-A'raf says about them is: *فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ* (So, the earthquake seized them - 7:78,91) which, as obvious, tells us that the punishment visiting them was that of the earthquake. Commentator al-Qurtubī has said that there is no contradiction here. It is possible that the earthquake came first and then they all were destroyed by the severe Sound. Allah knows best.

Verses 69 - 73

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلَنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبُشْرَى قَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ سَلَامٌ
فَمَا لَبِثَ أَنْ جَاءَ بِعِجْلٍ خَنِيذٍ ﴿٦٩﴾ فَلَمَّا رَأَى أَيْدِيَهُمْ لَا تَصِلُ
إِلَيْهِ نَكِرَهُمْ وَأَوْجَسَ مِنْهُمْ خِيفَةً قَالُوا لَا تَحْزَنْ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا
إِلَى قَوْمِ لُوطٍ ﴿٧٠﴾ وَأَمْرَاتُهُ قَائِمَةٌ فَضْحِكْتُ فَبَشَّرْنَاهَا

بِإِسْحَاقَ ۖ وَمِنْ وَرَاءِ إِسْحَاقَ يَعْقُوبَ ﴿٧١﴾ قَالَتْ يَوَئَلَتَى
 آلِ دَاوُدَ إِنَّا عَجُوزٌ وَهَذَا بَعْلِي شَيْخًا ۖ إِنَّ هَذَا لَشَيْءٌ عَجِيبٌ
 ﴿٧٢﴾ قَالُوا اتَّعَجِبِينَ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ رَحِمَتُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَتُهُ عَلَيْكُمْ
 أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ ۖ إِنَّهُ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ ﴿٧٣﴾

And Our messengers came to Ibrāhīm with the good news. They said, "Salām (peace)." He said, "Salām." Then he made no delay in bringing a roasted calf. [69]

So, when he noticed their hands not reaching for it, he found them strange and felt a bit of fright from them. They said, "Be not frightened. We have been sent to the people of Lūṭ." [70] And his wife was standing (nearby). She laughed, so, We gave her the good news about Ishāq, and about Ya'qūb after Ishāq. [71]

She said, "Woe is to me! Shall I give birth to a child while I am an old woman and this is my husband, an old man? This is something strange, indeed." [72] They said, "Do you marvel at Allah's command? Allah's mercy and His blessings are upon you, the people of the house. Surely, He is praiseworthy, glorious." [73]

Commentary

In these five verses, an event relating to Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام has been mentioned. Allah Ta'ālā sent some angels to give him the good news of a birth in his family because Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام had no children from his wife, Sayyidah Sārah and he wished he had. But, they were much advanced in years. Obviously, there was no hope. Then, Allah Ta'ālā sent the good news through the angels and that too of the nature that the new born would be a male child and even proposed the name of the child as Ishāq. Then, he was also told that he would live, have children and that the name of his son will be Ya'qūb, and both of them would be the messenger and prophet of Allah. Since these angels had come in human form, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام took them to be normal guests and lost no time in offering his hospitality. He placed a dish of roasted calf before them. But, they were really angels, free of eating and drinking. Therefore, despite the food being before them, they did not extend their hands towards it. When Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام noticed this, he was concerned. They did not look like

guests, may be they had come to create some problem for him. The angels scented his concern and disclosed their identity. They told him that they were angels of Allah Ta'ālā. There was no need for him to be frightened. They had been sent to give him the good news of a birth in his family, as well as to accomplish another mission, the mission of bringing Divine punishment on the people of Lūṭ عليه السلام. Sayyidah Sārah, the wife of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام was listening to this conversation from behind a curtain. When she found out that they were angels, not human beings, there was no need for the otherwise essential *hijāb*. She laughed at the good news of the birth of a child in old age and said, 'shall I give birth to a child while I am an old woman and my husband, an old man?' The angels said as to why would she marvel at the command of Allah Ta'ālā who has everything within His power. Was it not that, as a member of the prophet's family, she has been witnessing that this was a family on which extraordinary Divine mercy and blessing descends all the time, which is mostly above and beyond the obvious chain of causes? So, what was there to wonder about? This was a gist of the event. Let us now go to details as they appear in the text of the verses cited above.

The first verse (69) tells us that these angels had come to Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام with some good news. The good news has been mentioned later in the third verse (71): *كَبَّرْنَاهَا بِإِسْحَاقَ* (so, We gave her the good news about Ishāq).

Sayyidnā 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbās said that the three angels were Jibrā'il, Mikā'il and Isrāfīl عليهم السلام. (Qurtubī) They came in human form and greeted Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام with '*salām*.' Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام responded to their *salām* greeting and, taking them to be human, offered the usual hospitality.

Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام is the first human being who introduced the custom of honoring guests by offering hospitality to them. (Qurtubī) It was his routine that he would never eat alone. Instead, when came the time for meals, he would be looking out for a guest so that he could eat with him.

Al-Qurtubī has reported from Isrā'īlī narratives that, on a certain day, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام started looking for a guest at the time for meals. The man he met was a stranger. When he sat down to eat, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام said to him, 'say: I begin with the name of

Allah.' He said, 'I do not know Allah. Who and what is He?' Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام asked him to leave the dining-spread on the floor. When he went out, Sayyidnā Jibra'īl عليه السلام came in and said, 'Allah Ta'ālā says: As for him, We gave sustenance to him throughout his life despite his disbelief and as for you, you were stingy about giving him even one morsel of food.' Hearing this, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام went after him and called him back. He said, 'unless you tell me the reason why you turned me out first and why are you asking me to come in again, I will not go with you.'

When Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام told him the episode, the episode itself became the reason for his becoming a believer. He said, 'the Lord who made you do this is very noble. I believe in Him.' Then he went in with Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, behaved like a true believer and ate his food after having recited Bismillah first.

So, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, true to his habit of entertaining guests, welcomed angels who had come in human form. Naturally, to him they were human, and guests. The host did his most, lost no time and placed a roasted calf before them.

In the second verse (70), it was stated that the angels had, though, come in the human form and it was also possible that they could have been given human characteristics of eating and drinking at that particular time. But, the wiser choice for them was no other but that they should not eat so that the secret that they were angels comes out in the open. Therefore, their angelic characteristics were allowed to remain, even in their human form, because of which they did not extend their hands towards the food.

According to some reports, they had some arrows in their hands. They started poking the heads of their arrows into the roasted meat. When they acted in that manner, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام apprehended them to be his enemies, because, according to the social custom known to him, if a guest refused to eat, it was a sign of mischief to be made from his side. (Qurtubī) His apprehension was quashed when the angels themselves disclosed their identity and said that they were angels, therefore, they do not eat. So, there was no danger for him to bother about.

Injunctions and Rules

Many injunctions and important rules of guidance regarding social living appear in the verses under study. Imām al-Qurṭubī has discussed them in detail in his Tafsīr.

The *Sunnah* of *Salām*

The words of verse 69 -- قَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ سَلَامٌ (They said, “*Salām*.” He said, “*Salām*.”) – teach us that it is a *Sunnah* for Muslims that, when they meet each other, they should offer *Salām*. The guest coming in should say it first while others should respond.

That people say some words to greet each other when they meet is a custom found in all communities. But, the teaching of Islām is unique in this matter for the *masnūn* word of *salām* is السلام عليكم : *As-Salāmu ‘Alaikum*. It carries the name of Allah with it. So it is both a Dhikr of Allah, and a prayer for peace and protection from Him – in addition to being a guarantee of the protection of life, property and honor from one’s own side. (When we equate *As-Salāmu ‘Alaikum* with ‘peace on you’ we go by the anatomy and leave the spirit that is essential to it – tr.)

At this place in the Qur’ān, it has been said that the angels said ‘سَلَامًا’ (*salām*) and Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام responded with ‘سَلَامٌ’ (*salām*). Obviously, here it was not considered necessary to mention *salām* in its complete form – as customary in usage when it is said that a person said *salām* to someone where it is presupposed that he said the whole greeting of *As-Salāmu ‘Alaikum*. Similarly, at this place, *salām* stands for the full *masnūn* greeting which has been taught to his community by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم through his word and deed, that is, saying: السلام عليكم (*As-Salāmu ‘Alaikum*) at the beginning of *salām*, and: والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله (wa ‘alaikumu-s-salām, or wa ‘alaikumu-s-salāmu wa raḥmatu-l-lāh to be more generous) while responding to the *salām*.

Some Rules for Guests and Hosts

It has been said in the last sentence of verse 69: فَمَا لَيْتَ أَنْ جَاءَ بِعِجْلٍ حَنِيذٍ (Then he made no delay in bringing a roasted calf).

This tells us a few things:

1. It is a part of the etiquette of hospitality that the host should, soon after the arrival of the guest, bring out something to eat, or drink, something he has on hand and which could be offered quickly

and conveniently. Then, if the host is a man of means, he can arrange for additional hospitality later. (Qurtubī)

2. A host should not worry about making too many formal arrangements for a guest. Anything good available easily is good enough. Let him put it before the guest. Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام had some domestic animals at home. Therefore, he slaughtered a calf, had it roasted quickly and offered it to his guests. (Qurtubī)

3. Receiving guests and offering hospitality to them is a part of the essential etiquette of Islam, in fact, a hallmark of high morals. This is the blessed habit of prophets and the righteous. Is it necessary (*wājib*) to entertain guests? Or, is it not? ‘Ulamā’ have difference of opinion in this matter. According to the majority of them, it is a *sunnah*, and desirable, but not *wājib* (necessary, obligatory). Some of them say that it is *wājib* on village people that they should offer hospitality to a person who stays in their village because a stranger has no arrangement for his meals there. Since such arrangements are possible through a hotel in cities, therefore, it is not *wājib* on those who live in cities. Al-Qurtubī has reported all these different views in his Tafsīr.

In verse 70, it was said: فَلَمَّا رَأَوْا أَيْدِيَهُمْ لَا تَصِلُ إِلَيْهِ نَكِرُوا (So, when he noticed their hands not reaching for it, he found them strange and felt a bit of fright from them).

From here we learn that there are rules of etiquette for guests as well. A guest should accept whatever is offered. Let him partake from it a little bit to please the host, even if not willing to eat because of unfavorable taste or apprehended harm.

This very sentence also tells us that the host should not consider himself absolved after having placed the food before the guest. Instead, he should be benignly watching whether or not the guest is partaking of the food, as was done by Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام when he noticed that the angels were not eating.

But, this watching has to be discreet, not something like staring at the guest while he is eating. A casual look is enough, because looking at the morsels of food being eaten by the guest is contrary to the etiquette of entertainment and certainly very humiliating for the invited guest. This is illustrated by an incident relating to Khalīfah Hishām ibn ‘Abd ul-Mālik. On a certain day, the Khalīfah was sharing his food-

spread with a rustic Arab. The morsel of food being eaten by the Arab had a strand of hair in it. When Khalīfah Hishām noticed it, he told the Arab about it. The Arab instantly rose in a huff saying, 'we never eat with a person who watches our morsels.'

Al-Ṭabarī reports at this place: When the angels abstained from eating the first time, they had said that they do not eat free meals. If they were to accept payment for it, they would. Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام said, 'Yes, there is a price for it that you can pay. The price is: Say 'with the name of Allah' when you begin, and praise Him when you finish.' Hearing this, the archangel Jibra'īl عليه السلام told his companions, 'That Allah Ta'ālā calls him His friend is correct. He deserves it.'

This tells us that saying: بِسْمِ اللَّهِ (*bismillah*: With the name of Allah) when beginning to eat, and saying: الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ (*alhamdulillah*: Praise belongs to Allah) at the end of it is Sunnah.

Verses 74 - 83

فَلَمَّا ذَهَبَ عَنْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الرَّوْعُ وَجَاءَتْهُ الْبُشْرَى يُجَادِ لَنَا فِي
 قَوْمٍ لُوطٍ ﴿٧٤﴾ إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَحَلِيمٌ أَوَّاهٌ مُنِيبٌ ﴿٧٥﴾ يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ
 اَعْرِضْ عَنْ هَذَا إِنَّهُ قَدْ جَاءَ أَمْرُ رَبِّكَ وَإِنَّهُمْ آتِيهِمْ عَذَابٌ
 غَيْرُ مَرْدُودٍ ﴿٧٦﴾ وَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا لُوطًا سِيقَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَصَاقٌ
 بِهِمْ دُرْعًا وَقَالَ هَذَا يَوْمٌ عَصِيبٌ ﴿٧٧﴾ وَجَاءَهُ قَوْمُهُ يُهْرَعُونَ
 إِلَيْهِ وَمِنْ قَبْلُ كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ قَالَ يَقَوْمِ هَؤُلَاءِ
 بَنَاتِي هُنَّ أَطْهَرُ لَكُمْ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلَا تَخْزُونِ فِي صِفْتِي
 أَلَيْسَ مِنْكُمْ رَجُلٌ رَشِيدٌ ﴿٧٨﴾ قَالُوا لَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ مَا لَنَا فِي
 بَنَاتِكَ مِنْ حَقٍّ وَإِنَّكَ لَتَعْلَمُ مَا نُرِيدُ ﴿٧٩﴾ قَالَ لَوْ أَنَّ لِي بِكُمْ
 قُوَّةٌ أَوْ آوِي إِلَىٰ رُكْنٍ شَدِيدٍ ﴿٨٠﴾ قَالُوا يَلُوطُ إِنَّا رُسُلُ رَبِّكَ
 لَنْ يَصْلُوا إِلَيْكَ فَأَسْرِ بِأَهْلِكَ بِقِطْعٍ مِنَ اللَّيْلِ وَلَا يَلْتَفِتْ
 مِنْكُمْ أَحَدًا إِلَّا أَمْرَاتَكَ إِنَّهُ مُصِيبُهَا مَا أَصَابَهُمْ إِنَّ مَوْعِدَهُمُ
 الصُّبْحُ أَلَيْسَ الصُّبْحُ بِقَرِيبٍ ﴿٨١﴾ فَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا جَعَلْنَا

عَالِيهَا سَافِلَهَا وَأَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهَا حِجَارَةً مِّن سِجِّيلٍ ۖ مَّنْضُودٍ
﴿٨٢﴾ مُّسَوِّمَةً عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ ۖ وَمَا هِيَ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ بِبَعِيدٍ ﴿٨٣﴾

So, when fear left Ibrāhīm and the happy news came to him, he started pleading before Us for the people of Lūṭ.

[74] Surely, Ibrāhīm is forbearing, very penitent, ever-turning to Allah. [75]

O Ibrāhīm! Leave it, in fact, the command of your Lord has come, and there has to come upon them a punishment, not to be turned back. [76]

And when Our emissaries (angels) came to Lūṭ, he felt uneasy and was strained in his heart on account of them, and said, "This is a very hard day." [77]

And his people came to him, rushing upon him. And already they used to commit evil deeds. He said, "These are my daughters. They are far more clean for you. So, fear Allah and do not disgrace me in respect of my guests. Is there not a single right man among you." [78]

They said, "You know that we have no claim on your daughters, and you know well what we want." [79]

He said, "O that I had power over you or might have some strong support for refuge." [80]

They (the angels) said, "O Lūṭ, we are emissaries of your Lord. They shall never reach you. So, move with your family in a part of night, and none of you shall turn to look back; except your woman. There has to befall her whatever befalls them. Their deadline is the morning. Is it not that the morning is near?" [81]

So, when Our command came, We turned its highest into the lowest, and We rained on it stones of hard clay, one over another [82] marked, with your Lord. And it is not far from the transgressors. [83]

Commentary

Sūrah Hūd carries an account of different kinds of Divine punishments sent over past peoples because of their antagonism to prophets of the time. Described in the verses cited above is the moral condition of the people of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام and the severe punishment given to them.

Besides being disbelievers, the people of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام were involved in the practice of such abject evil and immodesty as was not found in the world before them, something even wild animals hate. That a man would pollute his honor and dignity with another man is a curse the fallout from which is far more injurious than common fornication. Therefore, the harsh punishment that descended on these people had never hit known practitioners of common acts of immodesty.

The event relating to Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام as it appears in the cited verses tells that Allah Ta'ālā sent some angels, including Sayyidnā Jibra'īl عليه السلام, to execute the punishment against these people. They first went to Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام in Palestine, the account of which has appeared in previous verses. After that, they came to Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام whose abode was located at a distance of ten or twelve miles from there.

Certainly great is the majesty of Allah Ta'ālā. When He seizes a people in punishment, the punishment that he makes descend upon them is chosen to be congruous to their misdeed. On this occasion too, these angels of Allah were sent in the form of handsome young men. When they reached the home of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام, he too took them to be visiting guests for they had come in human form. He found himself in a fix. If he backed out from entertaining guests, it would be against his dignity as a prophet. If he took them in as his guests, then, he knew how evil and dirty his people were. The danger was that they might storm his home and hurt the guests while he failed to defend them. So, in his heart, he said, 'this is a very hard day.'

Allah Ta'ālā has, in His great design, made this world of ours an open gallery of lessons full of the countless exhibits of His perfect power and eloquent wisdom. He made His friend Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام come out as a prophet from the home of Āzar, the idol-worshipper. In the home of the highly revered prophet, Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام, there was that wife of his who worked in league with disbelievers and opposed her prophet husband. When these honored guests in the form of handsome young men came to stay at the home of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام, his wife passed on the information to perverted hoods from these people telling them about the kind of guests they had in their home on that day. (Qurtubī, Maẓharī)

Things turned out as Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام had first apprehended.

This finds mention in the second verse (78): (And his people came to him, rushing upon him) – and they were already used to committing evil deeds.

It has been hinted here that such was the curse of their evil deed that they had lost all sense of modesty and propriety, so much so that they did not hesitate to storm even the home of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام for a purpose that sinister.

When Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام realized that it was difficult to protect his guests, he tried to divert the attention of his people from their evil advances by telling them that he would give his daughters in marriage to their chiefs, if they were to stop their evil-mongering. The marriage of a believing girl with a disbelieving man was permissible at that time. The practice had continued up to the early period of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, therefore, he had given two of his daughters in marriage to ‘Utbaḥ ibn Abī Lahab and Abu al-‘Āṣ ibn al-Rabī’, though both of them were disbelievers. Later came the verses that prohibited the marriage of Muslim women with disbelieving men as *ḥarām*. (Qurtubī)

According to some commentators, ‘my daughters’ at this place means the daughters of the whole community because every prophet is like a father to his people and the whole community is his spiritual progeny. It is supported by the noble verse: *الَّذِي أَوَّلَىٰ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ مِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجَهُ أَمْهَاتُهُمْ* (The Prophet comes first with the believers against their own selves and his wives are (like) their mothers – 33:6). This should be seen with the additional words: *وَهُوَ أَكْرَمُ لَهُمْ* (and he is [like] a father for them) as they appear in the rendition (*Qirā’ah*) of Sayyidnā ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ūd رضى الله عنه where the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been identified as a father to the entire Muslim Ummah. According to this Tafsīr, the statement of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام would mean, ‘you leave this evil habit of yours, behave like gentlemen, marry girls from your people and have them as your wives.’

After that, it was to warn them against Divine punishment that Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام said: *فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ* (So, fear Allah). Then he pleaded with them: *وَلَا تُخْزُونِي فِي ضَيْفِي* (do not disgrace me in respect of my guests) and then wondered: *أَلَيْسَ مِنْكُمْ رَجُلٌ رَشِيدٌ* (Is there not a single right man among you?), someone who would listen to his plaint.

But, there was no trace of gentility or even humanness left in any of them. So, in acid wickedness, they all responded: لَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمْ مَالَنَا فِي بَيْتِكَ مَعَ حَقِّ وَرَائِكَ لَتَعْلَمُنَّ مَا نُرِيدُ (You know that we have no claim on your daughters, and you know well what we want.)

Totally exasperated, what Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام could say at that time was: لَوْ أَنَّ لِي بِكُمْ قُوَّةً أَوْ إِنِّي إِلَىٰ رُكْنٍ شَدِيدٍ that is, 'only if I had enough strength in me to stand against this onslaught by my people, or that I had the backing of some strong group who would have helped me get rid of these oppressors.'

Seeing this anxiety of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام, the angels disclosed their identity and said, 'do not worry. Your group is very strong and very powerful. We are angels of Allah. They cannot touch us. We have come to execute the punishment for them.'

It appears in a Ḥadīth of the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said about it, 'may Allah Ta'ālā have mercy on Lūṭ عليه السلام. He was compelled to seek the protection of some strong group.' And the report in Tirmidhī carries another sentence with it, 'after Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام, Allah Ta'ālā sent no prophet whose clan or tribe was not his supporter.' (Qurtubī) This was true in the case of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. The disbelieving Quraysh did everything they could against him, but his entire clan supported him – though, they did not agree with him religion-wise. This was the reason why Banū Hāshim as a whole sided with the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in the boycott imposed by the Quraysh disbelievers whereby they had cut off essential supplies to him.

During this episode, as reported from Sayyidnā 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه, when the people of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام mobbed his home, he had closed the entrance door. The conversation with these wicked people was going on from behind it. The angels too were inside. The mob was threatening to jump the walls, barge in and break the door. Thereupon, came these words on the lips of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام. When the angels saw this anxiety of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام, they disclosed their real identity and asked him to open the door. It was time that they took over and gave the miscreants a foretaste of the Divine punishment. When the door was opened, archangel Jibrā'īl عليه السلام pointed his 'Feather' towards their eyes. They turned blind and started running.

At that time, the angels under Divine command said to Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام (So, move with your family in a part of night). And asked him to instruct everyone in his family not to turn and look back with the exception of his wife because she was going to be hit by the same punishment that was to fall on his people.

This could also mean that he was not to take his wife along with him. And it could also mean that, being his wife, she was to go along as part of his family, but she would not obey the instruction of not looking back he would give to his family. According to some reports, this is what happened. This wife started off with others, but when she heard the big bang of the punishment given to her people, she looked back and felt sorry at their destruction. At that moment there came a splintered rock and finished her off like others. (Qurtubī, Maḥzarī)

The angels had also told Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام that: إِنَّ مَوْعِدَهُمُ الصُّبْحُ (The deadline [of the punishment] is the morning). He said that he wished the punishment would come sooner. Thereupon, the angels said: أَلَيْسَ الصُّبْحُ بِقَرِيبٍ (Is it not that the morning is near?)

After that, the Qur'an portrays the occurrence of the punishment by saying: So, when Our command came, We turned whatever there was in their habitat upside down raining such stones over it as had the names of everyone there marked on it.

Reports say that these habitations were composed of four major towns where those people lived. These very habitations have been named as 'al-mu'tafikāt' (the towns overturned) elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an (9:70, 69:9). When the Divine command came, the archangel Jibra'il al-Amīn عليه السلام dissected the base of the land mass holding all those towns on top of it with his wing, raised all of it upwards in a way that everything stayed where it was, even water in a water vessel. It was in the backdrop of human, animal and canine voices coming from the sky that he heaved all these habitations straight up towards the sky and, then, threw the whole thing back upside down – as appropriate to and as called for by the evil they indulged in.

At the end of the verse (83), after having mentioned the actual punishment that hit the people of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام, it was to warn the contemporary peoples of the world that it was said: وَمَا هِيَ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ بَعِيدٍ (And it is not far from the transgressors). It means that people who

insist upon indulging in this shameful act should not consider themselves very far from this punishment. It can come even today. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, 'even in my Ummah, some people will do what the people of Lūt عليه السلام used to do. When this starts happening, then wait, for they too would be subjected to the same punishment that was inflicted on the people of Lūt عليه السلام.'

Verses 84 - 95

وَالِى مَدِينٍ آخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا ۖ قَالَ يَقَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ إِلَهِ غَيْرُهُ ۖ وَلَا تَنفُصُوا الْمِكْيَالَ وَالْمِيزَانَ إِنِّىٓ أَرَاكُمْ بِخَيْرٍ ۖ وَإِنِّىٓ أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ مُّحِيطٍ ﴿٨٤﴾ وَيَقَوْمِ أَوفُوا الْمِكْيَالَ وَالْمِيزَانَ بِالْقِسْطِ ۖ وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ وَلَا تَعْتُوا فِى الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾ بَقِيتُ لِلَّهِ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ ؕ وَمَا أَنَا عَلَيْكُمْ بِحَفِيظٍ ﴿٨٦﴾ قَالُوا يَشْعِيبُ أَصْلَوْتُكَ تَأْمُرُكَ أَنْ نَتَّخِذَ مَا يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُنَا أَوْ أَنْ نَفْعَلَ فِى أَمْوَالِنَا مَا نَشَؤُ ۖ إِنَّكَ لَأَنْتَ الْحَلِيمُ الرَّشِيدُ ﴿٨٧﴾ قَالَ يَقَوْمِ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِن كُنتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّى وَرَزَقْنِى مِنْهُ رِزْقًا حَسَنًا ۖ وَمَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ أُخَالِفَكُمْ إِلَىٰ مَا أَنهَكُم عَنْهُ ۖ إِن أُرِيدُ إِلَّا الْإِصْلَاحَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُ ۖ وَمَا تَوْفِيقِى إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَإِلَيْهِ أُنِيبُ ﴿٨٨﴾ وَيَقَوْمِ لَا يَجْرُ مَنَّكُمْ شِقَاقِىٓ أَنْ يُّصِيبَكُمْ مِّثْلُ مَا أَصَابَ قَوْمَ نُوحٍ أَوْ قَوْمَ هُودٍ أَوْ قَوْمَ صَالِحٍ ۖ وَمَا قَوْمُ لُوطٍ مِّنكُمْ بِبَعِيدٍ ﴿٨٩﴾ وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ ثُمَّ تُوبُوا إِلَيْهِ ۖ إِنَّ رَبِّى رَحِيمٌ وَدُودٌ ﴿٩٠﴾ قَالُوا يَشْعِيبُ مَا نَفَقَهُ كَثِيرًا يِّمَّا تَقُولُ وَإِنَّا لَنَرَاكَ فِينَا ضَعِيفًا ۚ وَلَوْ لَا رَهْطُكَ لَرَجَمْنَاكَ ۚ وَمَا أَنْتَ عَلَيْنَا بِعَزِيزٍ ﴿٩١﴾ قَالَ يَقَوْمِ أَرَهْطِىٓ أَعَزُّ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ ۖ وَاتَّخِذْ قُوَّةً وَرَأَى كُمْ ظَهْرِيَّ ۖ إِنَّ رَبِّى بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطٌ ﴿٩٢﴾

وَيَقُومِ اعْمَلُوا عَلَى مَكَانَتِكُمْ إِنِّي عَامِلٌ سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ
 مَنْ يَأْتِيهِ عَذَابٌ يُخْزِيهِ وَمَنْ هُوَ كَاذِبٌ وَارْتَقِبُوا إِنِّي
 مَعَكُمْ رَقِيبٌ ﴿٩٣﴾ وَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا نَجَّيْنَا شُعَيْبًا وَالَّذِينَ
 آمَنُوا مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنَّا وَآخَذَتِ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا الصَّيْحَةَ
 فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دِيَارِهِمْ جُثِمِينَ ﴿٩٤﴾ كَانَ لَمْ يَغْنَوْا فِيهَا أَلَا
 بُعْدًا لِلَّذِينَ كَمَا بَعَدَتْ ثُمُودُ ﴿٩٥﴾

And to Madyan (We sent) their brother, Shu'aib. He said, "O my people, worship Allah. You have no god other than Him. And do not lessen the measure and the weight. I see you quite well off, and I fear for you the punishment of an encircling day. [84]

And O my people, perfect the measure and the balance with justice and do not make the people short of their things, and do not go about the earth spreading disorder. [85]

Whatever is left (with you) by Allah is better for you, if you are believers. And I am not a watchman over you. [86]

They said, "O Shu'aib, does your *ṣalāh* (prayer) command you that we should give up what our fathers used to worship or give up our free-will in (spending) our wealth? You are provenly the man of wisdom and guidance." [87] He said, "O my people, tell me, if I am on a clear path from my Lord and He has provided me from Himself with a good provision, (should I still leave you unguided?) And I do not want to do in your absence what I prohibit for you. I want nothing but to set things right as far as I can. And my ability to do things comes from none but Allah. In Him alone I have placed my trust and to Him alone I turn in humbleness. [88] O my people, let not your hostility towards me cause you to suffer what was suffered by the people of Nūḥ, or the people of Hūd, or the people of Ṣāliḥ. And the people of Lūṭ are not far from you. [89] And seek forgiveness from your Lord, then turn towards Him in repentance. Surely, my Lord is very merciful, most loving." [90]

They said, "O Shu'aib, we do not understand most of

what you say, and, in fact, we see you weak among us. But for your clan, we would have stoned you. And to us, you are not a man of respect.” [91]

He said, “O my people, is my clan more respectable to you than Allah? And you have taken Him as something thrown behind your backs. Surely, my Lord encompasses all that you do. [92] And O my people, do what you can, I am to do (what I can). Soon you will know the one whom the punishment visits humiliating him, and the one who is false. And wait. I am, with you, waiting.” [93]

And when Our command came, We saved Shu‘aib and those who believed along with him, out of mercy from Us, and those who transgressed were caught by the Cry, and they were found (dead) in the homes, fallen on their knees, [94] as though they never lived there. Lo! Curse be upon Madyan, like Thamūd were cursed. [95]

Commentary

An account of Sayyidnā Shu‘aib عليه السلام and his people appears in the verses cited above. Besides being *kāfirs* and *mushriks*, his people used to give less in weights and measures. Sayyidnā Shu‘aib عليه السلام carried his call to them, told them not to give less in weights and measures, and warned them of Divine punishment if they persisted with this way of life. But, they did persist with their denial and contumacy and, as a consequence, all those people were destroyed through a severe punishment, details of which appear as follows.

In the first verse (84), it was said: وَإِلَىٰ مَدْيَنَ أَخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا (And to Madyan [We sent] their brother, Shu‘aib عليه السلام).

Madyan was actually the name of a town settled by Madyan ibn Ibrāhīm. Its present location has been given as ‘Ma‘ān’ in Jordan. The people of this town are also called Madyan. Therefore, by calling Sayyidnā Shu‘aib عليه السلام a ‘brother of Madyan,’ it was hinted that Allah Ta‘ālā sent His messenger to those people from among them so that they feel familiar and find it easier to accept his teachings.

Then, it was said:

قَالَ يٰقَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ إِلَٰهٍ غَيْرُهُ، وَلَا تَنْقُصُوا الْمِكْيَالَ وَالْمِيزَانَ

O my people, worship Allah. You have no god other than Him.

And do not lessen the measure and the weight.

Here, Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام has invited his people to believe in the Oneness of Allah (Tauhīd) because they were Mushriks, those who associated partners in the divinity of Allah. They worshipped trees. That has been pointed to through the use of the word: *الايكة* (*al-'aikah*: trees) in the Holy Qur'ān and it is in this respect that the people of Madyan have also been given the sobriquet of *أَصْحَابُ الْأَيْكَةِ* (*ashabu al-'aikah*: the people of *aikah* – 15:78, 26:176, 38:13, 50:14). Along with this *kufr* and *shirk*, they were also involved in the grave sin of cheating in commercial transactions when they would weigh short and give less in measure and thus deprive people of what was to come to them as their right. Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام told them not to do that.

Special Note

Here, it is useful to keep in mind that *kufr* and *shirk* are the roots of all sins. People soaked in these are usually the first to be invited to believe. Faith comes before consideration could be given to matters like social transactions and individual deeds. Whether they have deliverance in the present world or would deserve punishment are things that too are decided on the basis of this faith or denial. All events related to past prophets and their peoples mentioned in the Qur'ān bear witness to this mode of action – with the exception of two communities. Punishment came upon them because of their disbelief as well as due to their evil deeds. The people of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام were one of them upon whom, as mentioned earlier, their entire habitation was overturned. It has been stated that their evil practice was the reason for it. The people of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام were the other one. They were punished because of their *kufr* and *shirk* as well as because of their habit of weighing less and measuring short.

This tells us that both these things are most hated and grave, more than any other sin. Obviously, the reason is that they bring serious loss upon the entire human race leaving the world populated by it in a disorder of ominous proportions.

Turning to the verses cited above, we see that Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام has used his prophetic compassion to make his people stop their evil practice of giving short measure and less weight. The words he has used to say that are eloquent: *إِنِّي أَرَأَيْتُمْ تَزْنِي أَمْثَالَ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ مُّحِيطٍ* (I see you quite well off, and I fear for you the punishment of an encir-

cling day – 84). It means that Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام found them living comfortably. There were not poor, hungry and financially straitened which could be one of the reasons why they had to take recourse to such a cursed practice. Now that they were already blessed by Allah Ta'ālā, it required that they should not subject His creation to injustice. Not leaving it at that, they were also told that, in the event they did not listen to their prophet and did not stop this evil practice, he apprehended that Divine punishment might encircle them. This punishment could mean the punishment of the Hereafter, and the punishment of the present world too. Then, the punishments due to come in this world may be of different kinds. The lowest punishment could be that they might lose the prosperity they had, or they may fall victims to famines and price hikes, as said by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم:

'When a people start lessening weights and measures, Allah Ta'ālā makes them suffer from the punishment of famine and price hikes.'

Obviously, the very prohibition of weighing and measuring short makes weighing and measuring in full necessary. But, to emphasize it further, Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام said:

وَيَقْرَءُوا أَوْفُوا الْمِكْيَالَ وَالْمِيزَانَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ وَلَا تَعْتُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ

And O my people, perfect the measure and the balance with justice and do not make the people short of their things, and do not go about the earth spreading disorder – 85.

Then, affectionately, he explained to them:

بَقِيَّتُ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ، وَمَا أَنَا عَلَيْكُمْ بِحَفِظٍ

Whatever is left [with you] by Allah is better for you, if you are believers. And I am not a watchman over you – 86.

It means if they were not to listen to him, let them remember that he was not responsible for the eventuality that they may be seized by some punishment.

The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said about Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام that he was an orator among prophets. His eloquence was exceptional. He went to its farthest limits in order to make his people understand his message and take to the right path. But, even after having listened

to him, the response of his people was different from that given by ignorant diehards to their reformers. They threw taunts at him, made fun of him, and said:

أَصْلَوْتُكَ نَأْمُرُكَ أَنْ تَتْرَكَ مَا يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُنَا أَوْ أَنْ تَفْعَلَ فِى أَمْوَالِنَا مَا نَشَاءُ، إِنَّكَ لَأَنْتَ الْحَلِيمُ الرَّشِيدُ.

O Shu'aib عليه السلام, does your *ṣalāh* (prayer) command you that we should give up what our fathers used to worship or that we give up doing with our wealth whatever we wish? You are properly the man of wisdom and guidance – 87.

The *ṣalāh* (prayer) of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام was well known among his people as he was constantly devoted to it. Therefore, they referred to it tauntingly in the sense that (God forbid) his *ṣalāh* taught him to say all those 'wild' things. From what they said we learn that they too thought that religion is restricted to acts of worship, and that it had nothing to do with material dealings. Let everyone earn and spend one's wealth at will. Placing any restriction on that is no job of religion – as many people, even in this time of ours, generally believe, in total ignorance of the real fact.

What Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام had said to his people was good counsel based on earnest fellow feeling. But, his people responded to him with a sarcasm that was biting. However, they had done that to a blessed prophet of Sayyidnā Shu'aib's class. He heard their caustic comments, yet turned to them with the same empathy and once again tried to make them see the truth. He said: يَقُولُ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُ عَلَى بَيِّنَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّى وَرَزَقَنِى (O my people, tell me, if I am on a clear path from my Lord and He has provided me from Himself with a good provision, [should I still leave you unguided?]) Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام was telling his people that he had been blessed by his Lord in that He gave him good provision for his material life and in that He also gave him the light of revelation and spiritual insight. Now, with these wonderful assets in his hands, how could he ever think of becoming like them, willingly embracing error and injustice, and thus failing to bring the truth home to them?

After that, he said: وَمَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ أَمْلِكَكُمْ إِلَى مَا أَنهَضُكُمْ عَنْهُ (and I do not want to do in your absence what I prohibit for you). This tells us that the way a preacher of religion conducts his life has a major role in what he

preaches. What a preacher does not himself practice produces no effect on others.

Then, he said: **إِنْ أُرِيدُ إِلَّا الْإِصْلَاحَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُ** (I want to do nothing but to set things right as far as I can). And since, this effort too was not by his personal choice and volition, he further said: **وَمَا تَوْفِيقِي إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ، عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَإِلَيْهِ** (And my ability to do things comes from none but Allah. In Him alone I have placed my trust, and to Him alone I turn in humbleness).

After having given this good counsel to them, he warned them of the punishment of Allah Ta'ālā. He said:

وَيَقَوْمٍ لَا يُجِرُ مَتَكُمْ شِقَاقِي أَنْ يَصِيبَكُمْ مِثْلُ مَا أَصَابَ قَوْمَ نُوحٍ أَوْ قَوْمَ هُودٍ أَوْ قَوْمَ صَالِحٍ، وَمَا قَوْمُ لُوطٍ مِنْكُمْ بِبَعِيدٍ

And O my people, let not your hostility towards me cause you to suffer what was suffered by the people of Nūh, or the people of Hūd, or the people of Ṣāliḥ (عليه السلام). And the people of Lūṭ (عليه السلام) are not far from you.

The sense of the last sentence is that the overturned habitations of the people of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام were close to Madyan where they were. Then, in terms of time, the punishment that came upon them was very close. From this they could learn their lesson and leave their obstinacy.

Hearing this, his people were enraged. They said that had it not been for the support he had from his clan, they would have stoned him to death. Despite this threat, Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام, true to his mettle as a prophet, did not hesitate to tell them that they feared his clan all right, but would have no fear of Allah who holds everything in His power.

Finally, when his people did not listen to anything said to them, Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام told them that they could now wait for the punishment. After that, Allah Ta'ālā took out Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام and those who had believed in him, as is the Divine practice, from that habitation and the rest of them were destroyed instantly at the harsh Cry of Sayyidnā Jibra'īl عليه السلام.

Injunctions and Rulings:

Rules about Lessening of Weights and Measures

One of the reasons why punishment fell on the people of Sayyidnā

Shu'aib عليه السلام was their practice of weighing and measuring less than due – called *tatfīf*. The Holy Qur'ān has described the severe punishment for those who do that in Sūrah al-Muṭaffifīn which opens with the verse: وَلِلْمُطَفِّفِينَ (Woe to those who give less – 83:1). There is a consensus of the entire Muslim Ummah that doing so is strictly *ḥarām* (unlawful). Quoting a saying of Sayyidnā 'Umar رضى الله عنه, Imām Mālik has said in Mu'aṭṭā' that weighing and measuring less essentially means that someone does not fulfill the right of another person due on him, fully and duly. In fact, makes it less, whether it happens to be something given by weight, or measure, or something of another kind. If an employee falls short in performing his or her assigned duty, or an office worker, or a laborer cuts his working hours short, or fails to fulfill his job assignment as due, then, they all will be counted in this category. Anyone who does not perform his or her Ṣalāh with due consideration of everything obligatory and *masnūn* in it has also committed the crime of this '*tatfīf*.' May Allah keep all of us protected from it!

Ruling

It appears in Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī that the people of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام would save gold and silver by trimming the edges of gold and silver coins, like *dinār* and *dirham*, circulating in the country as official currency, and which they would channel back into circulation at par value. Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام prohibited them from doing so.

In Ḥadīth as well, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has declared the chipping of the coins of an Islamic state to be *ḥarām* (unlawful). Tafsīr authority, Zayd ibn Aslam has said exactly this while explaining the verse of the Qur'ān: تِسْعَةُ رَهْطٍ يُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا يُصْلِحُونَ (nine family heads spreading corruption in the land and not correcting [their ways] – 27:48). He says that these people of the city mentioned in the verse used to chip off gold and silver from *dinār* and *dirham* coins and ran a profitable business of their own through this source – something the Qur'ān calls a great corruption.

During the Khilāfah of Sayyidnā 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, someone was arrested while he was cutting a *dirham* coin. He was awarded a punishment of lashes and was paraded around head shaved. (Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī)

Verses 96 - 101

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَى بِآيَاتِنَا وَسُلْطَانٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٩٦﴾ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَ
 مَلَائِهِ فَاتَّبَعُوهُ أَمَرَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَا أَمْرُ فِرْعَوْنَ بِرَشِيدٍ ﴿٩٧﴾
 يَقْدُمُ قَوْمَهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ فَأَوْرَدَهُمُ النَّارَ وَيُسَّ الْيُورْدُ الْمُرُودُ
 ﴿٩٨﴾ وَاتَّبَعُوا فِي هَذِهِ لَعْنَةً وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ يُسَّ الرِّفْدُ الْمَرْفُودُ
 ﴿٩٩﴾ ذَلِكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْقُرَىٰ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْهَا قَائِمٌ وَحَصِيدٌ
 ﴿١٠٠﴾ وَمَا ظَلَمْنَاهُمْ وَلَكِنْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ فَمَا أَغْنَتْ عَنْهُمْ
 آلِهَتُهُمُ الَّتِي يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ لَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُ
 رَبِّكَ وَمَا زَادُوهُمْ غَيْرَ تَتْبِيبٍ ﴿١٠١﴾

And We sent Mūsā with Our signs, and with clear proof, [96] to Pharaoh and his group. So, they followed the command of Pharaoh. And the command of Pharaoh is not right. [97] He will lead his people on the Day of Judgement, and make them descend into the Fire. And it is the evil descending place. [98] And the curse was made to pursue them here and on the Day of Judgement. It is the evil reward to be offered. [99]

That is a part of stories of the towns that We narrate to you. Some of them are standing, and (some) harvested. [100]

And We have not wronged them; rather, they have wronged themselves. So, their gods whom they used to invoke beside Allah did not come to their help in any thing, when came the command of your Lord, and they gave them nothing more than destruction. [101]

Verses 102 - 111

وَكَذَلِكَ أَخْذُ رَبِّكَ إِذَا أَخَذَ الْقُرَىٰ وَهِيَ ظَالِمَةٌ ۖ إِنَّ أَخْذَهُ أَلِيمٌ
 شَدِيدٌ ﴿١٠٢﴾ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّمَنْ خَافَ عَذَابَ الْآخِرَةِ ۖ ذَٰلِكَ
 يَوْمٌ مَّجْمُوعٌ لِّلَّهِ النَّاسُ وَذَٰلِكَ يَوْمٌ مَّشْهُودٌ ﴿١٠٣﴾ وَمَا
 نُوَخِّرُهُ إِلَّا لِأَجَلٍ مَّعْدُودٍ ﴿١٠٤﴾ يَوْمَ يَأْتِ لَا تَكَلَّمُ نَفْسٌ إِلَّا

بِأَذْنِهِ فَمِنْهُمْ شَقِيٌّ وَسَعِيدٌ ﴿١٠٥﴾ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ شَقُوا فِى
التَّارِ لَهُمْ فِيهَا زَفِيرٌ وَشَهِيقٌ ﴿١٠٦﴾ خُلِدِينَ فِيهَا مَا دَامَتِ
السَّمُوتُ وَالْأَرْضُ إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ رَبُّكَ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ فَعَّالٌ لِّمَا يُرِيدُ
﴿١٠٧﴾ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ سَعِدُوا فِى الْجَنَّةِ خُلِدِينَ فِيهَا مَا دَامَتِ
السَّمُوتُ وَالْأَرْضُ إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ رَبُّكَ ۚ عَطَاءٌ غَيْرُ مَجْذُودٍ
﴿١٠٨﴾ فَلَاتُكَ فِى مِرْيَةٍ مَّا يَعْبُدُ هَؤُلَاءِ ۚ مَا يَعْْبُدُونَ إِلَّا كَمَا
يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُهُمْ مِنْ قَبْلُ ۚ وَإِنَّا لَمَوْفُونَ بِمَا نَصِيبُهُمْ غَيْرَ مَنْقُوصٍ
﴿١٠٩﴾ وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ فَاخْتَلَفَ فِيهِ ۚ وَلَوْ لَا كَلِمَةٌ
سَبَقَتْ مِنْ رَبِّكَ لَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَفِى شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ مُرِيبٍ
﴿١١٠﴾ وَإِنَّ كَلَامًا لِّیُوفِّيَنَّهُمْ رَبُّكَ أَعْمَالَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّهُ بِمَا یَعْمَلُونَ
خَبِيرٌ ﴿١١١﴾

And such is the seizing of your Lord when He seizes the (people of) towns while they are transgressing. Indeed, His seizing is painful, severe. [102]

In this there is a sign for the one who fears the punishment of the Hereafter. That is a day when all the people shall be gathered together, and that is a day having everyone present. [103] And We do not defer it but for a limited term, [104] the day it comes no one shall speak except by His leave. So, some of them are wretched and (some) blessed. [105]

As for those who are wretched, they shall be in the Fire. For them there is (nothing but) crying and howling. [106] They shall remain there for ever, as long as the heavens and the earth remain, unless your Lord wills (otherwise). Surely, your Lord does what He intends. [107]

As for those who are blessed, they shall be in Paradise living there forever, as long as the heavens and the earth remain, unless your Lord wills (otherwise) an award never to be cut off. [108]

So, be not in doubt about what they worship. They do not worship except in the way their fathers used to worship earlier. And surely, We are going to pay them their full share, non-curtailed. [109]

And We gave Mūsā the Book, then it was disputed about. But, for a word from your Lord that had already come, the matter would have been decided between them. And surely, they are in confounding doubt about it. [110]

And to all of them, your Lord shall pay for their deeds in full. Surely, He is aware of all that they do. [111]

Verses 112 - 113

فَاسْتَقِمْ كَمَا أُمِرْتَ وَمَنْ تَابَ مَعَكَ وَلَا تَطْغَوْا إِنَّهُ بِمَا
تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١١٢﴾ وَلَا تَرْكُنُوا إِلَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا
فَتَمَسَّكُمُ النَّارُ وَمَا لَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مِنْ أَوْلِيَاءَ ثُمَّ
لَا تُنصَرُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾

So, stand firm – as you have been commanded – you, and those who have repented with you, and do not cross the limits. Surely, He is watchful of what you do. [112]

And do not incline towards the wrongdoers, lest the Fire should catch you, and you shall have no supporters other than Allah, then you shall not be helped. [113]

Commentary

Events relating to past prophets and their peoples, from Sayyidnā Nuh عليه السلام to Sayyidnā Mūsā, have been mentioned in Sūrah Hūd in a fair enough order and detail with many wise counsels, injunctions and directives. At the end of the description of these events, it is by addressing the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that his entire community has been exhorted to draw their essential lessons from them. It was said: ذَلِكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَايَةِ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْهَا قَائِمٌ وَحَصِيدٌ (That is a part of the stories of the towns that We narrate to you. Some of them are standing, and (some) harvested – 100). It means that some of the habitations that were visited by Divine punishment still have their ruins standing while some others have been erased like harvested fields with no signs of what

was there in the past.

After that it was said that Allah did not wrong them, rather, they had wronged themselves (101,102) in that they abandoned their creator and sustainer and took to idols and other things as their gods. Finally, when the Divine punishment came, their self-made gods did not come to their rescue in any way. The lesson to learn was that the grip of Allah is painful and severe. When He seizes heedless wrongdoers doing what they do, this is what happens invariably.

Then, to turn them round to the concern of the Hereafter, it was said (103-105) that these events carry in them great lessons and signs for those who fear the punishment of the Hereafter, a day when all human beings will be gathered together, with everyone present there. That will be a day of such awe that no one present there shall dare utter a word without Divine permission.

Six verses later, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was addressed again by saying:

فَاسْتَقِمَّ كَمَا أُمِرْتُ وَمَنْ تَابَ مَعَكَ وَلَا تَطْغَوْا إِنَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

So, stand firm – as you have been commanded – you, and those who have repented [from *kufr* and are] with you, and do not cross the limits. Surely, He is watchful of what you do – 112.

The Sense of *Istiqāmah* (Standing Firm):

Some related problems and their solutions

Istiqāmah means to stand straight without the least tilt one way or the other (hence expressed in English as straightforwardness, straightness, directness, rectitude etc.) As obvious, it is not something easy to do. If we were dealing with a vertical object cast in iron, rock or some other material, our expert engineers could make it stand straight at the very outset in a way that it stands on perfect right angles from all sides without the least tilt on any side. But, having a moving object stand straight at all times and under all conditions in this perfect state is certainly something extremely difficult. For discerning people, this is no secret.

The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and all Muslims have been commanded in this verse that they should stand firm under all conditions in everything they do. *Istiqāmah* is a small word but in its sense it ex-

tends to many areas of application in a very unusual manner. The very meaning of this act of standing firm is that one has to move straightforwardly, as commanded by Allah, on the straight path identified by Him, remaining within the limits set by Him. This has to be in all matters of beliefs, acts of worship, personal and collective transactions, morals, social dealings, economic pursuits inclusive of all channels of income and expenditure. In the event, there occurs the slightest tilt, or decrease or increase, or shortcoming or excess, under any condition, and in any deed, in any of these areas of activity, Istiqamah becomes the first casualty.

Errors in thinking and practice that show up around us are an outcome of this deviation from the command to stand firm. When people do not stand firm in beliefs (*'aqā'id*), they start with self-invented practices in religion (*bid'āt*) and end up into the extremes of *kufr* (disbelief) and *shirk* (associating others with Allah). The principles of Allah's Oneness (*Tauhīd*) and His Being (*Dhāt*) and Attributes (*Ṣifāt*) conveyed to us by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم are moderate and sound. People who commit any act of excess and deficiency or addition and deletion in them – even if they may be doing so with good intentions on their part – shall be considered astray and in error. As for those who belittle and lessen the limits set for having regard and love for the blessed prophets, everyone knows that they are astray and audacious. Similarly, those who commit the excess of assigning a prophet proprietary rights in Divine attributes and powers also cross those limits and fall into an error of this nature. The Jews and the Christians lost themselves into this error. The methods of worshipping Allah and seeking nearness to Him determined by the Glorious Qur'ān, and the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم are great benchmarks. Any slicing, undercutting or shortcoming in these drags one down from the desired level of standing firm and, similarly, any addition to these from one's own side ruins one's chances of standing firm by his indulgence in self-innovated ways in established religion. Unfortunately, such a person honestly thinks that he is pleasing Allah while, in fact, it is precisely the very cause of His displeasure. Therefore, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has very emphatically prohibited his community from indulging in self-innovated ways in established religion (*bid'āt* and *muḥdathāt*) and has declared that to be acute error and straying. Therefore, before one does something as an act of worship (*'ibādah*) for the pleasure of

Allah and His Rasūl صلى الله عليه وسلم, he must first investigate and ensure fully as to the nature of his action. He must find out whether or not what he is going to do stands proved from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and his noble Ṣaḥābah in the same state and form. If it does not, let him not waste his good time and energy in this pursuit.

Similarly, there are matters relating to transactions, morals and social dealings. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has followed the principles given by the Qur'ān in his practical teachings through which he has marked out a moderate and sound way of conducting ourselves in our lives. It has provided the Muslims with a moderate and straight course of action in the matters of friendship, enmity, softness and strictness, anger and forbearance, miserliness and generosity, economic activity and monasticism, trust in Allah and use of possible material means, finding what is necessary and relying on the Prime Mover of all causes. These are different things, yet they have been fused into one, a straight path of moderation, and a virtual gift to Muslims not to be found elsewhere in the whole world. So, the key is to act in accordance with these teachings and become perfect human beings. When people do not stand firm and tilt one way or the other, the society goes bad inevitably.

In short, the concept of standing firm is comprehensive. It covers all parts and pillars of religion. When acted upon correctly, it becomes its eloquent demonstration.

Sufyān ibn 'Abdullāh Thaqafī asked the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, 'please tell me something so comprehensive about Islām that I need not ask anyone anything after you.' He said, 'قُلْ آمَنْتُ بِاللَّهِ ثُمَّ اسْتَقِمْ : Say: I believe in Allah. Then, stand firm on it.' (Reported by Muslim, as quoted by al-Qurṭubī)

'Uthmān ibn 'Abdullāh al-Azdī said that once he went to the famous Ṣaḥābī and the commentator, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه and requested him for some words of advice. He said, 'عَلَيْكَ بِتَقْوَى اللَّهِ، وَالْإِسْقَامَةِ وَإِتِيعٍ وَلَا تَبْتَدِعْ' (Reported by al-Dārimī in his Musnad, as quoted by al-Qurṭubī). It means that he should make the fear of Allah essential for him, and also that he should stand firm in his faith. The method of doing so was to follow the percepts of the Shari'ah in all religious matters and not to invent and introduce any *bid'ah* in it from his own side.

Out of the many tough jobs handled in this world, the toughest is nothing but to stand firm. Therefore, Ṣufī authorities have said that standing firm is a station much superior to the working of miracles (*karāmah*). It means that a person who is holding on firmly to the assignments of his religion is a saint in his own right – even though, no miracle has issued forth from him throughout his life.

Sayyidnā ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās رضى الله عنه said that no verse revealed to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in the entire Qur’ān was harder and more trying than this (112). And he said that once the Companions noticing some gray strands of hair in his blessed beard sorrowfully remarked, ‘old age is approaching you much earlier.’ Thereupon, he said, ‘Sūrah Hūd has made me old.’ The events of severe punishments that came upon past communities as described in Sūrah Hūd could also be the reason for it, but Sayyidnā Ibn ‘Abbās رضى الله عنه said that this verse alone is its reason.

Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī reports from Abū ‘Alī Sirriy that he, on seeing the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in a dream asked him, ‘have you said something like “Sūrah Hūd has made me old”?’ He said, ‘yes.’ Abū ‘Alī asked again, ‘had the subject of punishments that came upon the peoples of the past prophets made you old?’ He said, ‘no, in fact, this saying of Allah Ta‘ālā did: فَاسْتَقِيمْ كَمَا أُمِرْتُ (So, stand firm – as you have been commanded – 112)’.

As for the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, it is obvious that he had graced this world as the blessed substantiation of the perfect universal man. Standing firm was his natural habit. But then, why was it that he felt its weight to be so conspicuous and telling upon him? Perhaps, it was because the verse did not ask him to stand firm in an absolute sense, instead, asked him that this act of standing firm should be as commanded by Allah. How overwhelming is the fear and awe prophets have of their creator and master is well recognized. It must have been the effect of this fear and awe that, despite having his perfect stance of firmness, he was still concerned whether or not he had been able to come up with the kind of firmness and rectitude expected by his master, the most exalted Allah.

And it is also possible that he was not that concerned about his personal stance of firmness, because he, by the grace of Allah, had it in him. But, there was something else to it. In this verse, the command

given to him was also given to the entire Muslim Ummah. So, it was his realization that his Ummah may find it difficult to stand firm as commanded that made him sad.

After the command to stand firm, it was said: **وَلَا تَغْفِرُوا** (and do not cross the limits). This word is a derivation from the verbal noun: **طَغْيَان** (*ṭughyān*) which means to cross limits, and which is the opposite of standing firm. It will be noticed that the positive statement to stand firm in the verse has not been considered sufficient, rather, its negative aspect, that of its prohibition, was clarified expressly. This establishes the sense of the verse: 'do not cross the limits set by Allah and His Rasūl – in beliefs, acts of worship, transactions, morals etc. – for it was the outlet of all disorder and corruption in material and religious life.

To keep human beings protected from this disorder and corruption, another guideline has been provided in the second verse (113): **وَلَا تَرْكَبُوا إِلَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا فَتَمَسَّكُمُ النَّارُ** (And do not incline towards the wrongdoers, lest the Fire should catch you). The word: **لَا تَرْكَبُوا** (*lā tarkanū*) comes from the verbal noun **رُكُن** : **Rukūn** which means a slight tilt towards one side having confidence in and approval of it. Therefore, the sense of the verse is: 'Whoever indulges in injustice and oppression ruins his or her life, worldly and spiritual both – this is a fact every one knows. But, the slightest of tilt or inclination towards the unjust, placing confidence in them, being pleased with them, could also push man to the edges of the same abyss.'

What is the meaning of this 'tilt' and 'inclination'? There are some statements of Ṣaḥābah (Companions) and Tabi'īn (Successors) about it in which there is no contradiction or difference. They are all correct in their respective places.

Sayyidnā Qatādah said, it means, 'do not have friendship with the unjust and do not follow what they say.' Ibn Jurayj said, 'do not nurse a leaning of any kind towards the unjust.' Abū al-Āliyah said, 'do not like everything they do.' (Qurtubī) Al-Suddiyy said, 'do not court the favor of the unjust through servile flattery (*mudāḥanah*), that is, do not observe silence or show your approval at their evil deeds.' 'Ikrimah said, 'do not sit in the company of the unjust.' Qaḍī al-Baiḍāwī said, 'following them in personal looks, fashion, and ways of living are all included under this very prohibition.'

Qāḍī al-Baiḍāwī also said that this verse exudes the highest imaginable degree of severity in the matter of prohibition and unlawfulness of injustice and oppression. The reason is that it not only prohibits friendship, and all other cordial relationships, with the unjust but, going farther ahead, it also prohibits the least possible inclination towards them, or even sitting with them.

Imām ‘Abdur-Rahmān ibn ‘Amr Al-Awzā‘ī said, ‘with Allah Ta‘ālā no one is as detested as the ‘Ālim (religious scholar) who, for the sake of his worldly interest, goes to meet someone unjust. (Maḏharī)

According to Tafsir al-Qurṭubī, this verse tells us that it is obligatory (*wājib*) to abstain from the company of those who disbelieve (*kāfirs*), those who disobey (sinners) and those who innovate in the established religion (practitioners of *bid‘ah*) – unless they have to be met under some compulsion. The truth of the matter is that company and social setting play a major role in one’s betterment or corruption. Therefore, the famous Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said about the two words of these two verses that Allah Ta‘ālā has compressed the entire religion within the two letters: لا (*lā*: do not). The first one appears in the first verse: لَا تَطْغَوْا (*lā taṭghaw*: do not cross the limits – 112) and the second one appears in the second verse: لَا تَرْكَبُوا (*lā tarkanū*: And do not incline towards the wrongdoers – 113). The first ‘*la*’ or ‘do not’ prohibits the crossing of the limits set by the Sharī‘ah of Islām while the other prohibits the company of wrongdoing people – and this is the essence of the whole religion.

Verses 114 – 123

وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ طَرَفِي النَّهَارِ وَزُلْفًا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ إِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ
يُذْهِبْنَ السَّيِّئَاتِ ط ذَلِكْ ذِكْرِي لِلذَّكِّرِينَ ﴿١١٤﴾ وَاصْبِرْ فَإِنَّ
اللَّهَ لَا يَضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١١٥﴾ فَلَوْلَا كَانَ مِنَ الْقُرُونِ
مَنْ قَبْلِكُمْ أُولُوا بَقِيَّةً يَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْفَسَادِ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا
قَلِيلًا مِّمَّنْ أَنْجَيْنَا مِنْهُمْ وَاتَّبَعَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مَا أُتْرِفُوا فِيهِ
وَكَانُوا مُجْرِمِينَ ﴿١١٦﴾ وَمَا كَانَ رَبُّكَ لِيُهْلِكَ الْقُرَى بِظُلْمٍ
وَأَهْلَهَا مُصْلِحُونَ ﴿١١٧﴾ وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً

وَاحِدَةً وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ ﴿١١٨﴾ إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ رَبُّكَ
وَلِذَلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَةُ رَبِّكَ لَا مَلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ
وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿١١٩﴾ وَكَلَّا تَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الرُّسُلِ
مَا نَشِئْتَ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ وَجَاءَكَ فِي هَذِهِ الْحَقُّ وَمَوْعِظَةٌ وَذِكْرَى
لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٢٠﴾ وَقُلْ لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ اعْمَلُوا عَلَى
مَكَانَتِكُمْ إِنَّا عَمِلُونَ ﴿١٢١﴾ وَانْتَظِرُوا إِنَّا مُنْتَظِرُونَ ﴿١٢٢﴾
وَلِلَّهِ غَيْبُ السَّمُوتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ كُلُّهَا فاعْبُدْهُ
وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَيْهِ وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

And establish *ṣalāh* at both ends of the day, and in the early hours of the night. Surely, good deeds erase bad deeds. That is a reminder for the mindful. [114]

And be patient, for Allah lets not the reward of the good-doers be lost. [115]

Then, why is it that there was none, among the generations before you, having some remnants (of wisdom) to stop people from creating disorder in the land, except a few among them whom We saved? And the wrongdoers pursued the luxuries they were involved in, and they became sinners. [116]

And your Lord is not such that He would destroy the towns unjustly while their people are good in their ways. [117]

Had your Lord willed, He would have made all the people a single community. But, they will continue in their differences, [118] except those whom Allah has blessed with mercy. And for that He has created them. And perfect is the word of your Lord: "I will surely fill the hell with Jinns and the human beings, all together." [119]

And We narrate to you everything from the events of the messengers with which We strengthen you heart. And herein there has come to you the truth, a good counsel and a reminder to those who believe. [120]

Say to those who do not believe, "Do whatever you can. We are doing (what we can). [121] And wait. We are

waiting.” [122]

And to Allah belong the secrets of the heavens and the earth, and to Him the whole matter shall be returned. So worship Him and have trust in Him. And your Lord is not unaware of what you do. [123]

Commentary

The diction of the Qur’ān points out to the great station the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم occupies

It would be recalled that following the description of awe-inspiring events relating to past prophets and their peoples in Sūrah Hūd, some instructions have been given to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and his community that begin from the previous verse (112): فَاسْتَقِيمْ كَمَا أُمِرْتَ (So, stand firm – as you have been commanded). In these instructions, the beauty and eloquence of the Holy Qur’ān stands out as highly educative. It will be noticed that a positive command to do something has been addressed to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم with his community included therein as a corollary. Examples are as follows: فَاسْتَقِيمْ كَمَا أُمِرْتَ وَمَنْ كَانَتْ مَعَكَ (So, stand firm – as you have been commanded – you and those who have repented with you – 112) and أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ (And establish *ṣalāh* – 114) and then: وَاصْبِرْ (And be patient – 115). But, when something was prohibited and instruction was given to abstain from it, the address was beamed at the Muslim community directly, for instance: لَا تَطْفَرُوا (and do not cross the limits – 112) and: لَا تَزْكُنُوا إِلَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا (And do not incline towards the wrongdoers – 113).

If we were to look at this in depth, it will be realized that it happens to be the general form used throughout the Qur’ān whereby a positive imperative has been addressed to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم while the negative imperative of prohibition to the Muslim community. This is an indication towards his high station. It tells us that things worth leaving off are things the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم himself abstained from. Allah Ta‘ālā had made his elemental nature tuned so right that he would simply not incline towards any desire or thing that was evil. The limit was that things that were permissible and *ḥalāl* (lawful) during the early period of Islām – but, their becoming *ḥarām* (unlawful) later was already settled in the ultimate knowledge of Allah Ta‘ālā – were things he never went near, even when they were *ḥalāl*, such as, liquor, interest, gambling etc.

In this verse (114), addressing the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, he and his entire Ummah has been commanded to establish *ṣalāh*. Scholars of Tafsīr among the Ṣaḥābah and Ṭābiʿīn concur that *ṣلوۃ: ṣalāh* at this place means obligatory prayers (al-Bahr al-Muḥīṭ, al-Qurtubī) and the *ʿiqāmah* of *ṣalāh* means establishing and implementing it fully and faithfully and being constantly regular with it. Some have said that it means performing Ṣalāh with due consideration of all its inherent rules of etiquette. Some others have said that it means performing Ṣalāh at its most preferred time. These reflect the three positions taken in the Tafsīr of the verse: *أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ* (*aqimi 's-ṣalāh*: establish the prayer). The truth of the matter is that there is not much of a difference in there. Everything said here is included in the sense of 'establishing the prayer'.

Following the command to establish Ṣalāh, the statement about its timings appears briefly as: 'and establish Ṣalāh at both ends of the day [at the beginning and at the end], and in the early hours [parts] of the night.' Here, *زُلْفَا* (*zulafan*) is the plural of *زُلْفَة* (*zulfah*) which means a part or unit. As for the prayer 'at both ends of the day,' there is a consensus of revered early commentators that the prayer at the first end is the Ṣalāh of Fajr. However, the prayer at the last end has been taken by some of them as the Ṣalāh of Maghrib for it is almost at the end of the day. But, some others have taken the Ṣalāh of 'Aṣr as the prayer at the last end because that is the last prayer of the day. The time of Maghrib is not a part of the day, rather, comes after the passage of the day. Then, the text's: *زُلْفَا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ* that is, 'prayers during parts of the night,' have been declared as referring to the Ṣalāh of Maghrib and 'Ishā' by the majority of early commentators Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Mujāhid, Muḥammad ibn Ka'b, Qatādah, Daḥḥāk and others. And a Ḥadīth which says that *زُلْفَا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ* (prayers during parts of the night) are Maghrib and 'Ishā' confirms it. (Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr)

When the text's: *طَرَفَيِ النَّهَارِ* (at both ends of the day) means the Ṣalāh of Fajr and 'Aṣr, and *زُلْفَا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ* (in the early hours or parts of the night) the Ṣalāh of Maghrib and 'Ishā,' the timings of four prayers find mention in the verse. What remains to be mentioned is the Ṣalāh of Zuhur which appears in another verse: *أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذُلُوكِ الشَّمْسِ* (Establish *ṣalāh* at the decline of the sun – 17:78).

After the command to establish Ṣalāh, and its timings, the text

points out to the great good these bring. It was said: *إِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ يُذْهِبْنَ السَّيِّئَاتِ* (Surely, good deeds erase bad deeds). Early commentators have said that '*al-hasanāt*' means all good deeds. These include Ṣalāh, Ṣawm, Zakāh, Ṣadaqāt, good morals, good dealings etc., but Ṣalāh takes precedence over all of them. Similarly, '*as-saiyyi'āt*' covers all bad deeds, *kabīrah* (major sins) or *ṣaghīrah* (minor sins). But, there is another verse of the Qur'ān, as well as, several sayings of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم where it has been particularized with *ṣaghīrah* sins, according to which, it would mean that good deeds – Ṣalāh being the superior most – become the *kaffārah* (expiation) of *ṣaghīrah* sins which stand erased. This verse of the Qur'ān says: *إِنْ تَحْتَسِبُوا كَبَائِرَ مَا تُنْتَهُونَ عَنْهُ تَكْفُرْ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ* (If you abstain from the major [sins] out of what you have been forbidden from, We shall write off your minor sins – Al-Nisā' 4:31) (See Ma'ariful-Qur'ān, Volume II, pages 405-410 under 4:31 for a detailed discussion of the nature of *kabīrah* and *ṣaghīrah*)

It appears in a Ḥadīth of Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said that five prayers and a Jumu'ah until the next Jumu'ah, and a Ramaḍān until the next Ramaḍān, become the *kaffārah* (expiation) of all sins committed in between them. This is subject to the condition that the person concerned has remained safe from major sins (*kabā'ir*). It means that major sins are such that they are not forgiven without Taubah (repentance). But, minor sins do get to be forgiven automatically when one keeps doing other good deeds such as Ṣalāh, Ṣawm, Ṣadaqah etc. However, Tafsīr al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ has reported the saying of authentic scholars of the Principles of the Shari'ah of Islām that even minor sins are forgiven by doing good deeds only when one feels ashamed of having done these and makes a solemn resolve of not doing these in the future. It is important that one does not insist on them. There are many events mentioned in Ḥadīth reports to the effects that sins were so erased. They too state clearly that this happens on condition that the sinner is ashamed of his doing, repents and resolves not to do it in future. It was on this basis that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has given the good news of forgiveness of a sin to a sinner. Allah knows best.

The following have been declared as *kabā'ir* or major sins in well known Ḥadīth reports:

(1) Ascribing anyone as partner or equal in the Being or Attributes

of Allah Ta'ālā.

- (2) Intentionally skipping an obligatory (*farḍ*) Ṣalāh.
- (3) Killing someone unjustly.
- (4) Committing fornication or adultery.
- (5) Stealing.
- (6) Drinking.
- (7) Disobedience to parents.
- (8) Taking false oaths.
- (9) Giving false witness.
- (10) Practicing magic.
- (11) Transacting interest.
- (12) Usurping the property of the orphan by unfair means.
- (13) Deserting the battlefield in Jihād.
- (14) Accusing chaste women falsely.
- (15) The taking of someone's property or wealth by unfair means.
- (16) Breaking a pledge.
- (17) Committing a breach of trust.
- (18) Using foul language against anyone.
- (19) Accusing someone as a criminal unjustly, etc.

Details about major and minor sins appear in standard books written by Muslim scholars. It can also be seen in 'Sin sans Taste' (*Gunāh-i-bay-Ladhdhat*) a treatise written by this humble writer.

In short, this verse proves that sins are also forgiven by doing good deeds. Therefore, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, 'after a bad deed gets to be committed by you, do a good one and it will erase its evil,' and he said, 'deal with people pleasantly.' (Ibn Kathīr with reference to the Musnad of Aḥmad)

Sayyidnā Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī said, 'I requested the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم to order me to do something. He said, 'if you fall into some sin, do some good deed after that, so that it erases the sin.'

In fact, these Aḥādīth tell us about the preferred method of repent-

ing from a sin. This is as it has been reported in the Musnad of Aḥmad from Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said, 'if a Muslim unfortunately falls into some sin, he should make *wuḍū* and offer two *raka'āt* of *nafl* prayer – that sin will be forgiven. (All *riwāyāt* have been taken from Ibn Kathīr) This prayer is known by the very name of Ṣalātu-t-Taubah (the prayer of repentance).

In the last sentence of the verse (114): ذَلِكَ ذِكْرٌ لِلَّذِينَ (That is a reminder for the mindful), the word: ذِكْرٌ (*dhālik*) could be referring to the Holy Qur'ān, and to the do's and don'ts both, which have been mentioned earlier. The sense is that this Qur'ān, or its injunctions referred to above, are guidance and good counsel for those who listen to and are used to obeying it. The hint embedded here is that a person, who is so compulsively obstinate that he would just not think about anything reasonable, remains deprived of every guidance.

In verse 115, it was said: واصبر فان الله لأيضع اجرالمحسنين (And be patient, for Allah lets not the reward of the good-doers be lost).

Literally, صبر (*ṣabr*) means to tie. Therefore, in usage, Ṣabr is also used to carry the sense of keeping one's naughty self in control. Also included within its sense is the effort made to keep one's self firm and unflinching when it comes to doing what is good and right, as well as the effort to check and hold it back from getting involved with bad deeds. At this place, asking the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم to be patient could also mean that the injunctions given to him in the cited verses – for example, 'stand firm,' 'establish *ṣalāh*,' etc. – are things he should hold fast to. And it is also possible that the purpose may be to exhort him to be patient in the face of the hostility of enemies and the pains caused by them. As for what was said after that – 'Allah lets not the reward of the good-doers be lost' – it obviously suggests that '*al-muḥsinīn*' (good-doers) are people who faithfully observe the injunctions of do's and don'ts as given in the cited verses. In other words, they are firm in their religion, adhere to the limits set by the Shari'ah, maintain no friendly relations with the unjust unnecessarily, are punctual with their Ṣalāh, offering it as its etiquette demands, at the most preferred timings, and that they stand firm on all religious injunctions.

The essence of what has been said above is what the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has himself said while defining 'Iḥsān' – "obey and wor-

ship Allah Ta'ālā as if you are seeing Him or, at the least, that Allah Ta'ālā is seeing you.” When one achieves this station of the certitude of the Being and Attributes of Allah Ta'ālā, all words and deeds that issue forth from him become automatically correct. Worth remembering are the three truisms that were so popularly recognized among the revered scholars of the early centuries of Islām (*as-salaf*). These they used to exchange in writing to each other (as if they were souvenirs worth saving). They said:

(1) Anyone who gets busy working for the 'Ākhirah (life-to-come), Allah Ta'ālā takes it upon Himself to put his worldly chores in order and sees to it that they come out right for him.

(2) Anyone who corrects his inward state of being, (so much so that he moves the orientation of his heart away from everything and turns it towards Allah Ta'ālā) He sees to it that his outward state of being stands corrected all by itself.

(3) Anyone who puts his matter with Allah Ta'ālā sound and correct, Allah Ta'ālā Himself corrects all matters pertaining to him and to those he relates with. The original wording of these three truisms is being given below:

وكان اهل الخبر يكتب بعضهم الى بعض بثلاث كلمات، من عمل لآخرته
كفاه الله امر دنياه، ومن اصلاح سريره اصلاح الله علانيته ومن اصلاح فيما
بينه، وبين الله اصلاح الله ما بينه وبين الناس (تفسير روح البيان ج ٢ ص ١٣١)

(Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Bayān, p. 131, v. 2)

Given in the third and the fourth verse (116, 117) is the reason why Divine punishment came upon past peoples as well as the instruction as to how they could have stayed safe from it. It was said: How sad that among them there could have been at least some good and wise people who would have stopped their erring fellowmen from spreading disorder. The exception was that of a counted few who followed the noble prophets and they were the ones who stayed safe from the punishment. As for the rest of them, they went for the luxuries of the material world and turned into compulsive sinners.

In this verse, people of discernment, balance and foresight have been identified through the expression: 'اولوا بقية: remnants [of wisdom].' The word: *بقية* (*baqīyyah*) means that which remains. It is human habit

that one lets what is most dear to him remain with him under all conditions, preserved and retrievable. When some need would arise, he would give away everything but not that. Therefore, reason and insight are called '*baqīyyah*' or remnants, because that is the dearest one has.

It was said in the fourth verse (117) that Allah does not destroy towns and habitations unjustly while people living there are good in their ways, that is, they are believing Muslims. The sense is that the probability of injustice and oppression does not exist with Allah Ta'ālā. Those destroyed deserve being destroyed. Some early commentators have said that the word: ظلم: '*ẓulm*' (injustice) in this verse means *shirk* (ascribing of partners in the pristine divinity of Allah) and مُصْلِحُونَ: '*muṣliḥūn*' (people good in their ways) refers to people who, despite being Mushriks and Kāfirs, are good in morals and dealings, do not hurt and cause pain to anyone, do not lie and do not cheat. Thus, the sense of the verse comes to be that the punishment of the world does not fall on a people simply because of their being Mushriks and Kāfirs – unless they were to spread disorder in the land by their very deeds and morals. The cause of all punishments that came upon the past peoples was but their particular evil deeds. The people of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام caused him all sorts of pains. The people of Sayyidnā Shu'aib عليه السلام spread disorder by weighing and measuring short. The people of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام took to the worst type of evil act. The people of Sayyidnā Mūsā and 'Īsā oppressed their prophets. The Holy Qur'ān says that these very misdeeds were the reason why punishment came upon them. Divine punishment does not come in this world because of bland Kufr and Shirk. The everlasting punishment of the fire of Hell is its punishment. Therefore, some 'Ulama' have said that countries and governments can survive with Kufr and Shirk, but they cannot survive with injustice and oppression.

Difference: Blameworthy and Praiseworthy

When it was said in the fifth verse (118) – 'had your Lord willed, He would have made all the people a single community' – the sense is that had it been the will of Allah, He would have made all human beings accept Islām by force. All of them would have then become nothing but Muslims without any difference remaining between them. But, such are the dictates of His wisdom that, in this world, Allah Ta'ālā does

not compel anyone to do something. Instead, He has entrusted man with a kind of choice under which he could do whatever good or bad he wishes to do. Then, human temperaments differ, ways differ and deeds differ. The outcome is that there always will be some people who would keep at loggerheads against the true faith – of course, with the exception of those whom Allah Ta‘ālā has blessed with His mercy, that is, those who have been following the noble prophets.

This tells us that ‘difference’ at this place means hostility and opposition to the true faith and the teachings of prophets. The difference based on Ijtihād, which is inevitable among religious authorities and jurists of Islam, an ongoing process since the period of the Ṣaḥābah, is not included under this purview, nor is it contrary to Divine mercy. In fact, it is the very dictate of Allah’s wisdom and mercy. Those who have declared the differences among Mujtahid Imāms to be counter to Mercy in terms of this verse, have done something which is itself counter to the context of this verse as well as counter to the consistent practice of the Ṣaḥābah and Tabi‘īn.

وَاللَّهُ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى أَعْلَمُ

And Allah is Pure and High and He knows everything best.

Alḥamdulillāh

The Commentary on

SŪRAH HŪD

Ends here